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DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN SOME ROMANIAN WORKPLACE MEETINGS

MIHAELA GHEORGHE & STANCA MĂDA & RĂZVAN SĂFTOIU

Introduction

Meetings are seen as “interactions which focus, whether indirectly or directly, on workplace business” (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 59), being one of the most important decision-making avenues used today. Participants are dealing with sensitive issues or with everyday workplace business using various communicative strategies according to their objective or subjective goals and their social statuses. Whether in the position of chairperson or regular participant, the speaker aims at establishing and maintaining a certain balance between the power and the politeness dimensions of workplace discourse. Efficiency seems to be the key-word in deciding which strategies fit best in the particular context of every meeting. In order to be effective, any strategy requires certain communicative skills in the encoding and the decoding processes used by participants. The speaker encodes both the objective and the subjective purposes in a single utterance, which is almost simultaneously decoded by the hearer. Among the variety of communicative strategies used by the speakers in workplace meetings, this paper focuses on the argumentative ones, as they were depicted in the analysis of two Romanian meetings.

Researchers have examined the discourse of workplace meetings from different perspectives: the discursive strategies used in the management of meetings (Barbato 1994, Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris 1997), the discursive realizations of status in meetings (Craig & Pitts 1990, Sollitt-Morris 1996), the complex communicative processes involved in getting things accomplished interactionally through meeting talk (Drew & Heritage 1992, Sarangi & Roberts 1999), interruptions, seen as manifestations of power in meetings (Edelsky 1981, Craig & Pitts 1990), the amount of talk contributed by different participants as an indication of dominance (Edelsky 1981, Holmes 1992, Sollitt-Morris 1996, Holmes & Stubbe 2003), politeness considerations of participants' contributions to meetings (Pearson 1988, Morand 1996, Holmes & Stubbe 2003).

1. Methodological issues and description of corpus

Our research is part of a larger on-going project at the Faculty of Letters from Transylvania University of Braşov, Romania. The project is entitled *Professional Language*

in Present-day Romanian. Linguistic Patterns and Discursive Structures and is supported by a governmental grant (CNCSIS, ID 142). Its main objectives are to identify some characteristics of effective communication in various Romanian workplaces and to disseminate the results of the analysis among communication and workplace practitioners.

The methodology used for collecting the data was adapted after the participatory framework proposed by the Language in the Workplace (LWP) Project, based at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. It involves collecting authentic linguistic data with the help of volunteers, real participants to the communicative process in certain workplace contexts, in order to minimize the intrusion of the research team in the organization. The recordings are completed with ethnographic information and submitted for analysis. The results are thoroughly checked through a feedback mechanism, involving both participants and researchers (see Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 19-30). The ethical aspect is covered through the extensive preparation of the research in advance, the written agreement of participants and the freedom, on the participants' behalf, to edit the recorded material according to the organizational policy.

The corpus of this paper consists of two recordings of workplace meetings, which took place in similar business contexts, with a comparable participatory framework and structure. The first recording (TEXT 1) was done during a department meeting in a Romanian organization. The chair of the meeting is the manager of the sales and marketing department (Carmen, woman, aged 40) and the other participants (Adi, Dorin, Ionuț, Costi, Vasile) are all regional managers (men, aged between 25 and 50).

The second recording (TEXT 2) is that of a board meeting in the Romanian branch of a multinational organization. There are six participants (two men and four women, aged between 30 and 40): the general manager (Ina) is also the chairperson, the sales and marketing manager (Carol), the logistics department manager (Eni), the financial manager (Dana), the industry manager (Rareș), and administrative assistant (Irina).

2. Managing interaction in meetings

Meetings are the main venue of transmitting information, planning and organizing everyday activity. During meetings, decisions are made and people work together in order to solve tasks. Mumby (1988: 68) considers that workplace meetings "function as one of the most important and visible sites of organizational power, and of the reification of organizational hierarchy". What is more, workplace meetings are also visible sites of politeness, collegiality and solidarity, or on the contrary, of disrespect and impoliteness, being an ideal context of "relational work" (Fletcher 1999).

Regardless of their type, degree of formality or goals, workplace meetings are a dynamic communicative process based on presentation of points of view and on nego-

tiation. When people are involved in this type of interaction, they use various communicative strategies that take into consideration aspects of politeness and contribute to the construction of power.

Meeting management is a dynamic process in which all participants play a part, whether cooperative or resistant. Among the participants to a meeting, the *role of chair* is vital in carrying out an effective meeting. It is the chair's role to *set the agenda* and to *open the meeting*. It is crucial that they *establish control* at this stage to ensure that participants orient to the chair's authority throughout the meeting. The chair also *keeps track of the progress* of the meeting, marking the stage that is reached and ensuring that all relevant issues are covered.

Effective management often involves *negotiating consensus*. It is the chair's job to make sure everyone at a meeting knows the purpose of the meeting, what the issues being discussed are and that everyone knows what has been agreed. Related to this, it is the chair's role to make sure *everyone feels involved* in the decision-making process. This can include an appropriate amount of small talk and humor in the meeting. Sometimes the chairperson acts as a mere *mediator*, becoming as 'invisible' as possible when the situation requires such behavior. In such cases, without the pressure exercised by the chairperson, people discuss more freely.

In this paper we will analyze and illustrate just a selection from the range of the meeting management strategies and their grammatical interface, focusing mainly on how they instantiate ways of argumentation (and emotive argumentation). We are also interested in the relationship between power and politeness in meetings, trying to define and exemplify specific patterns for Romanian workplace interaction.

3. Data analysis

In what follows, we will mainly focus on the discourse of the chairperson and we will try to identify and comment both on some of the discursive strategies and on the grammatical interface.

The discourse of the chairperson invariably starts with *setting the agenda*. There are at least two frames that may be identified at this level: the *topic frame*, i.e. an explicit and clear presentation of the topics to be discussed during the meeting, and a *time frame*, i.e. the time allotted to each topic from the agenda. This suggests that the chairperson controls the entire meeting and indirectly transmits to the rest of the participants that (s)he is allowed to take advantage of the position to interfere and end a topic. If only topics are framed, this may mean that the time allotted to each topic will be negotiated on the spot, thus the chairperson appearing more employee-focused and open to reactions.

4. Balance between expressions of power and solidarity

In the following extract from TEXT 1, a workplace meeting in a company selling roof windows and loft ladders, Carmen is the head of the Sales and Marketing Department and the chairperson.

Romanian	English
<p>CARMEN: O analiză interesantă vă propun aici la top, unde aveți și voi niște centralizatoare a topului de vânzări și <i>vă rog chiar să le deschideți...</i> tabelele astea... top scări, top ferestre. [...] avem o altă situație care <i>mi se pare alarmantă</i> aicea. Top zero. Adică din totalul nostru de dealeri treizeci la sută nu vând deloc ferestre, ceea ce înseamnă vreo o sută trei dealeri din cei activi. [...] aicea <i>vreau neapărat să discutăm un pic</i> și poate... avem o sută de dealeri care nu vând deloc, dar din ăștia o sută vreo șazeci au standuri. <i>Asta este și mai alarmant.</i> [...] O să vedeți voi, de fapt, din... din această, acest raport al ședinței noastre... <i>eu v-am menționat că vreau să faceți câte un raport, da?</i> deci analiza dealerilor care nu vând, dar au standuri se va prezenta raport de către fiecare director în parte și aceia să analizăm... îi mai ținem la anu, nu îi mai ținem, ne scoatem standul, avem stand pentru că e într-o zonă bună și atunci, sigur, îl lăsăm, dar aici fiecare, <i>o să vedeți voi ce trebuie să facem și ce nu. Da?</i> [...]</p> <p><i>Și mergem acuma la top scări unde situația este și mai dură.</i> Deci avem la top scări avem un dealer care vinde douăzeci la sută [...] deci <i>asta ne arată două lucruri, o dată</i> că depindem de el și că nu e bine, că de fapt o să vedeți creșterea la scări se datorează lui, deci dacă el nu era, noi nu ne făceam planul, dar <i>doi la mână arată și faptul că</i> putem să multiplicăm situația asta.</p>	<p>CARMEN: I suggest you an interesting analysis here with the top, where you also have some tabels of top sellers and <i>please open them...</i> these tabels... top for loft ladders, top for windows. [...] we have another situation that <i>seems to me alarming.</i> Top zero. This means that from our total of dealers thirty percent do not sell at all windows, which means a hundred and three dealers from the active ones. [...] here <i>I urgently want to talk a little about this</i> and maybe... we have one hundred dealers who do not sell at all, but from them almost sixty have booths. <i>This is even more alarming.</i> [...] you will see, in fact, from this... this report of our meeting... <i>I mentioned I wanted from each of you a report, right?</i> So, the analysis of the dealers who do not sell, but who have booths, each manager will present a report and we will analyze them... if we keep them, if we don't keep them, we give up on our booth, we have a booth because it is in a good area and then we will surely leave it there, but here <i>each of you will see what we have to do and not. Right?</i> [...]</p> <p><i>And now we are moving to top sales of ladders where the situation is even tougher.</i> So we have a dealer who sells twenty percent [...] so <i>this shows us two things, one thing is that</i> we depend on him and this is not right, because you will see that the increase for ladders is thanks to him, and but for him we wouldn't have reached the target, and <i>the second thing is that</i> we can multiply this situation.</p>

Although in the beginning, Carmen presents herself as a powerful leader, gradually she succeeds in balancing means of expressing power (first person singular – *I suggest, I urgently want, I mentioned I wanted*, emphatic constructions – *I urgently want to talk, This is even more alarming*) with means of creating solidarity (first person plural – *each of you will see what we have to do and not, now we are moving to, this shows us two things*, asking for feedback – *I mentioned I wanted from each of you a report, right?, each of you will see what we have to do and not. Right?*).

When reviewing the results of the sales, the chairperson takes a stand and personally gets involved in the presentation by gradually characterizing the situation as *alarming*, *more alarming* and *even tougher*. By choosing these adjectives, the chairperson transforms herself in the one who draws a warning signal that there are problems and indirectly asks the participants (sales representatives from different areas) to take the necessary measures to improve the sales results. Both the gradual presentation (from neutral to intensified) and the choice of the words are used strategically: *alarming* is an adjective that suggests a warning of existing or approaching danger, while *tough* further emphasizes the idea of difficulty of the presented situation.

If in the previous extract, Carmen used emotional involvement as an argumentative strategy, in the next example, taken from TEXT 2, Ina – the general manager – does not make use of such strategy.

Romanian	English
INA: Deci pe ordinea de zi, azi avem discutarea rezultatelor din 2005... cu diversele influențe pe care le-au avut anumiți parametri pe care nu i-am... stabilit... nu i-am avut în vedere la bugetare... Vom trece în revistă obiectivele pe care ni le-am asumat în 2005, cele generale ale companiei... și... ăă... vom discuta apoi ce obiective ne asumăm în 2006... urmând ca să trecem la discuții individuale pe obiective, cu fiecare în parte, după ce stabilim obiectivele companiei...	INA: So, on the agenda, today we have discussions on the results from 2005... with the various influences of several parameters we haven't... established... we haven't taken into consideration for budgeting... we will review the objectives that we assumed in 2005, the general ones of the company... and... errr... then we will discuss what objectives we set for 2006... following this, we will have individual discussions on objectives, with each of you, after we set the objectives of the company...

Not only in the beginning, but also throughout the entire meeting, Ina uses mainly the first person plural (*we have discussions on the results from 2005, we will review the objectives that we assumed in 2005*) in order to get people involved to make them feel they part of the team. Even though she does not use emotive argumentation, the efficiency of her discourse is maximum.

5. Description of emotions

Emotional involvement is also visible when the chairperson describes a personal mood or when she commits herself to the truth of the statement.

Romanian	English
CARMEN: Arhitecți. Este subiectul meu preferat. Deci... când sunt prost dispusă și vreau să mă cert mă uit la lista arhitecților. Pe cuvântul meu. Deci atunci când vreau să nu mai pot, mă uit la arhitecți. Vă rog frumos deschideți. (TEXT 1)	CARMEN: Architects. It's my favourite topic. So... when I'm in a bad mood and I want to have an argument I take a look at the list of the architects. Trust my word! So, when I want not to be able to stand it anymore, I take a look at the list of architects. Please, open your folders! (TEXT 1)

Carmen starts a new topic on the agenda by characterizing it as being “the favourite topic”. She obviously marks the speech with irony, preparing the audience for the presentation of bad results. The chairperson shifts focus on herself and associates the list of architects with a “bad mood”. This type of presentation (focused on personal involvement) is aimed at creating a positive image of the chairperson, who thus appears as a preoccupied head of the department, hoping that putting herself down (*when I want not to be able to stand it anymore*) will impress the audience and make them feel as bad as she pretends to feel. In order to emphasize the authenticity of the moment, the chairperson commits herself to the truth of the statement in a colloquial manner: *Trust my word!* The speech is deconstructed, the chairperson pretends not to have control over the situation, but in fact it is a strategy meant to manipulate the audience and obtain the envisaged result.

When presenting another topic (performance indicators), the chairperson briefly reviews the head of the table just to introduce the issue in a personal manner. In the extract below, Carmen takes the problem personally, suggesting that it gives her a headache.

Romanian	English
<p>CARMEN: Indicatori de performanță. Cantitativ număr de dealeri noi, număr de produse vândute, număr de alți colaboratori introduși în rețea: constructori, proiectanți. Număr execuție, asistență, construcție, montaj. <i>Și ajung la încă o problemă care îmi creează dureri de cap: evaluări execuție-montaj. Țăstă vroiam să fie ultimul punct. Evaluare execuție montaj despre care am vorbit tot timpul și nici unul nu ați făcut. Absolut nici unul. Deci aici aveți, zic eu, ca o hartă albă: verificare montaje zero, arhitecți zero.</i> (TEXT 1)</p>	<p>CARMEN: Performance indicators. Quantity of new dealers, number of products sold, number of collaborators included in the network, constructors, designers. Manufacturing, assistance, construction, assembling. <i>And I come to another problem that gives me a headache: evaluation manufacturing-assembling. I wanted this to be the last topic. We've been talking all the time about the evaluation manufacturing-assembling and nobody has done anything. Absolutely nobody. So here you have, as I see it, a blank map: verification of assembling zero, architects zero.</i> (TEXT 1)</p>

The chairperson gets emotionally involved in the speech in order to create herself a positive image, of a concerned manager who gives a lot of time to finding the most appropriate solution but gets no help in return.

This strategy is supported by the use of verbs of perception: *see, feel*.

Romanian	English
<p>CARMEN: Cifra de afaceri. Analiza cheltuielilor. Arhitecți. Situația cheltuielilor de reclamă. Buget unu la sută. Și aici aveți fiecare câte un buget pentru că trebuie să vă uitați. Ne uităm împreună. Pe zona de unu, [nume firmă] am și realizat ceva. <i>Văd că cifra de afaceri a scăzut față de anul trecut. Chiar am simțit.</i> Ei nu mai vând ferestre? (TEXT 1)</p>	<p>CARMEN: Turnover. Expense analysis. Architects. Advertising expenses. Budget one percent. And here each of you has a budget to take a look at. We will take a look together. For area D 1, [company name] we achieved something. <i>I see that the turnover has decreased since last year. We even felt it.</i> Don't they sell windows anymore? (TEXT 1)</p>

In Romanian, the verb “to see” is used only as a verb of visual perception and lacks the cognitive meaning (“to understand”), which is common in English. In the extract above, Carmen may use this verb both to describe the evolution of the turnover according to the table she has in front of her (visual perception), and to express her coming to understand the effects of its decrease (cognitive meaning). As far as the verb “to feel” is concerned, we notice a transfer from its denotative meaning to a connotative one: the decrease of the turnover is “felt” as a decrease of salaries and bonuses.

6. *Illuminating narratives*

Appeal to the emotional side of the participants may be achieved by another strategy: introduction of narrative passages with the purpose of setting a positive example for the employees. In the following extract, Adi is one of the regional sales managers and his main complaint is that it takes a lot of time to get in contact with the clients because he has to travel a lot and gets at a certain company after working hours, thus not being able to finish his work. Adi introduces a new topic on the agenda – obtaining a guarantee from a prospective client – but Carmen takes advantage of her position during the meeting and suggests a corrective move (*No! It's not working like this.*).

Romanian	English
<p>CARMEN: Adi, stai o clipă! Nu! Nu merge așa. Uite, știi cazul Lindab. Spre exemplu, Lindab merg în trasee ca și noi. Ajunge la 11 noaptea în anumite locații. Păi îți imaginezi că la 11 noaptea un portar nu-i dă nici ăștia cec, dar are o garanție în clienții lor. Deci, hai să avem la ăștia care știm că ne fac probleme, să avem aicea biletul la ordin sau cecul. Ăla, garanția, acolo unde avem probleme, da?</p> <p>(TEXT 1)</p>	<p>CARMEN: Adi, wait a second! No! It's not working like this. <i>Look, I know the case of Lindab. For example, Lindab people take the same steps as we do. They get there at 11 at night in some locations. Well, you can imagine that at 11 at night the door keeper won't give our man a cheque, but he trusts their clients. So, let's have here for those who give us trouble, let's have a note of hand or a cheque. That, the guarantee, where we have problems, OK?</i></p> <p>(TEXT 1)</p>

This move is used by Carmen to introduce the vivid example of a competitor, emphasizing the idea that a guarantee would be enough for bad payers. The correction functions in two ways: on the one hand, it is about *correcting the topic* (Carmen does not agree that another participant should introduce a topic on the already presented agenda), and on the other hand, it is about *correcting the attitude* (Carmen is supportive of her subordinates and offers them suggestions of how to deal with bad payers). The narrative ends with a summary (the solution: *That, the guarantee, where we have problems*) and with a phatic unit (*OK?*) aimed at ratifying a decision (*let's have here for those who give us trouble, let's have a note of hand or a cheque*).

When talking about the company's relationship with residential architects, Carmen introduces a new personal narrative. This time, the story contains regrets for a missing action (not giving files to the clients) and is aimed at obtaining an emotional response from the participants.

Romanian	English
CARMEN: Extraordinar de mult contează faptul că noi nu avem relații bune cu arhitecții. Extraordinar de mult contează. [...] <i>Și eu când am intrat în mai multe birouri de arhitect, primul lucru m-am uitat ce bibliorafturi are, știind că Velux are. Foarte mult contează să fie biblioraft.</i> (TEXT 1)	CARMEN: The fact that we don't have good relationships with architects counts a great deal. Counts a great deal. [...] <i>When I went to several architects offices, the first thing I did was to look at the files he has, knowing that Velux has. Having a file counts a great deal.</i> (TEXT 1)

7. Asking for participants' opinions

In order to appear supportive, the chairperson tends to ask for participants' opinions on a certain point, while previously characterizing the situation.

Romanian	English
CARMEN: Analiza clienților. Aici aveți un tabel cu clienții restanți. Pe acest tabel vreau să mergem. Prima dată vă prezint un o sinteză a acestei analize. Soldul clienților noștri este [suma], din care neîncasați la termen 45,8 la sută. <i>Ce părere aveți?</i> Sigur aici intră și cei cu întârzieri de trei-patru zile, dar, ca idee. Foarte mulți. (TEXT 1)	CARMEN: Analysis of clients. Here you have a tabel with remainder clients. This is the table I want to discuss. Firstly, I will present a synthesis of this analysis. The due balance for our clients is [sum], with 45.8 percent back payments. <i>What do you think?</i> Of course, those with three or four days delay are also included here, but, just as an idea. Very many. (TEXT 1)

Carmen has a specific manner of introducing the topics, by just giving the headline of the table. This shows that she is not so much interested in giving an introduction, but in analyzing the situation. In the extract above, the chairperson signals her wish for an opinion from the participants (*45.8 percent back payments. What do you think?*) and yet she does not stop to listen to the commentaries. It is worth noticing that she leads the reactions by introducing a short commentary: *Very many*.

When talking about the company's relationship with residential architects, Carmen firstly introduced a personal narrative, grabbing the attention of the audience and then asked for opinions from the participants.

Romanian	English
<p>CARMEN: Extraordinar de mult contează faptul că noi nu avem relații bune cu arhitecții. Extraordinar de mult contează. [...] Și eu când am intrat în mai multe birouri de arhitect, primul lucru m-am uitat ce bibliorafturi are, știind că Velux are. Foarte mult contează să fie biblioraft. Nu mai zic de faptul... Băi, n-am să uit când ați zis că voi, noi nu dăm nimica, noi n-am dat nimica ani întregi. Păi da, păi aia... Dacă le-am da, binențeles că ar face. E te te! Că de când dăm, avem mai puțini decât aveam înainte, când nu dădeam niciun comision. <i>Ce putem face? Aștept propuneri de la voi pentru că mă simt foarte neputincioasă în fața acestei situații. Și vreau să știu poate sunteți de altă părere sau poate, nu știu, poate, nu vreți sau poate nu puteți. Și vreau de la fiecare în parte.</i></p> <p>(TEXT 1)</p>	<p>CARMEN: The fact that we don't have good relationships with architects counts a great deal. Counts a great deal. [...] When I went to several architects offices, the first thing I did was to look at the files he has, knowing that Velux has. Having a file counts a great deal. I don't add the fact that... Guys, I'll never forget when you said that you, we don't give anything and we haven't given anything for years. Well, it's this, it's that... If we gave them, of course they would do it. Go figure! Since we started to give this, we have less clients than before when we used not to give any commission. <i>What can we do? I'm waiting for suggestions from you because I feel very helpless about this situation. And I want to know maybe you have a different opinion or maybe, I don't know, you don't want or you can't. And I want opinions from each of you.</i></p> <p>(TEXT 1)</p>

Her entire speech is emotion-based. The chairperson puts herself down (*I feel very helpless*) in order to show that the situation is out of control and she is out of suggestions. Unlike the narrative, which has a supportive function, asking for advice is face-threatening. Carmen feels that her negative face may be at risk (she may no longer appear as a problem-solver) and wants to be included in the process of finding solutions to the proposed problem.

If previously Carmen asked for a general opinion, in the extract above she is more specific and makes this clear: *I want opinions from each of you.*

In an extract from TEXT 2, Ina is closer to her subordinates than Carmen, being personally involved in the process of budgeting that she explains to them gradually, just as she introduces new figures or follows the columns of the comparative table.

Romanian	English
<p>INA: Acum ajungem la B... Am comparat 2004 cu 2005.</p> <p>DANA: Indicatorii cei reali.</p> <p>INA: <i>Hai să vedem, mai știm să bugetăm?</i> (...) Hm, hm, hm. Și hai să ne uităm și la formule... Da? forecast-ul doi, cel din octombrie. Da? Și să pornim de la cel vechi. După cum vedem, deviația în cheltuieli față de buget este doar de 1,79 la sută... creșterea cheltuieli față de cât ați bugetat, da și... sunt mai mici decât forecast-ul.</p>	<p>INA: Now we get to B... We compared 2004 with 2005.</p> <p>DANA: The real indicators.</p> <p>INA: <i>Let's see, do you still know how to budget?</i> (...) Hm, hm, hm. And let's take a look at the formulas... OK? The second forecast, the one from October. OK? And let's start from the old one. As we can see, deviation of expenses in the budget is only 1.79 percent... an increase of the expenses in the budget, OK and... they are less than the forecast.</p>

8. *Appeal to rules and regulations*

Doing a certain job or having a certain position in a company implies a set of responsibilities. Sometimes, this feature is exploited by the chairperson, who appeals to rules and regulations, in order to indirectly threaten the person(s) who have not carried out a job properly. We consider this to be another emotional strategy by means of which the chairperson enacts her coercive power. In the following extract, the chairperson appeals to a set of responsibilities that are presented in the job description for the position of regional sales manager.

Romanian	English
<p>CARMEN: Tocmai de-aia am zis să mergem pe filiale. DORIN: Și atunci trebuie mers. Nu, nu, nu la filiale mă refer. Aceeași situație este și la nivel de filială. <i>După părerea mea, eu de exemplu am mers și acuma pe Arad, săptămâna asta, săptămâna trecută o listă cu arhitecții de pe rezidențiale.</i> [...] DORIN: Și după părerea mea cam așa trebuie făcut și așa am și început să fac. Mers sau aflat. Eu de exemplu am aflat la Arad printr-un arhitect, care arhitect e și dealerul nostru. Și am zis, te rog, fă-mi o listă cu arhitecții care sunt pe rezidențiale și care au proiecte și au lucrări, proiecte. Și mă duc eu la fiecare și îi dotez cu bibliorafuri, cd-uri și așa mai departe și insist la ei. Deci, eu cam așa văd problema de rezolvat. De aflat în fiecare zonă sau în orașele mai mari, în reședințele de județ, acolo sunt arhitecții, aflat cine sunt... CARMEN: <i>O secundă, du-te și adu fișa postului pentru director de vânzări.</i> Păi da' asta trebuia făcut și până acum. Deci nu e nicio nouitate ce spui. Lucrul ăsta l-am discutat tot timpul. (TEXT 1)</p>	<p>CARMEN: That's why I said that we should go for branches. DORIN: And this means we go for it. No, no, no, I'm not talking about branches. The situation is the same at the level of branches. <i>To my mind, I for example went to Arad, this week, last week with a list of the architects for residential areas.</i> [...] DORIN: And to my mind this is how we should do it and this is how I started to do. I went there and I found out. I for example found out through an architect who is also our dealer. And I said, please, make me a list with the architects for residential areas who have projects and work in the field. And I go to each of them and I give them files, CDs and so on and I insist. So, this is how I see the solution to the problem. To find out in each area or in big cities where there are architects and who they are... CARMEN: <i>One second, go and bring the job description for sales manager.</i> Well, this was supposed to be done so far. So, there is no news in what you're saying. We've been discussing this matter all the time. (TEXT 1)</p>

Dorin is one of the regional sales manager who was accused of not doing a proper job in his area. When he gets the floor, he tries to defend himself by giving a lot of personal examples and by shifting focus to himself (*To my mind, I for example...*). In order to create authenticity, Dorin even introduces direct speech: *And I said, please, make me a list with the architects for residential areas who have projects and work in the field.*

The head of the Sales Department indirectly threatens a subordinate by making reference to the job description. In fact, Carmen will use the same strategy several times during the meeting. By invoking the job description, she wants to remind the participants that they are under a contract with strict regulations and they should follow them. In any other context, reference to the job description would be regarded as hilarious, but in the context of a workplace meeting, it may have the expected effect: the person will react to the indirect blame and take a stand.

Whenever the chairperson uses reference to the job description, she acts as an agent who admonishes the wrong-doer (*This will be a condition for your salaries...*).

Romanian	English
<p>DORIN: Eu fac contract. Crede-mă că nu mi-e greu. Că trebuie să trec niște date... Dacă acele contracte, hârtiile contează...</p> <p>CARMEN: Dar nu contractele, banii... Păi nu contează hârtiile, nu contează hârtia, dar contează relația. Ha! <i>Nu există nimic, nu-i nici hârtie, nici factură, deci absolut nimic nu există.</i> Asta va fi condiția în salariile voastre pe anul... de fapt era menționat și anul ăsta. Și contează și la premiere. <i>O să vă aduc și fișa postului ca să o mai citim o dată.</i></p> <p>(TEXT 1)</p>	<p>DORIN: I make a contract. Believe me, it's not difficult. I only need to fill in some data... If those contracts matter, if papers matter...</p> <p>CARMEN: It's not the contracts, it's the money... Papers don't count, but a relationship does count. Ha! <i>There is nothing, no paper, no invoice, absolutely nothing.</i> This will be a condition for your salaries for the year... in fact, it was mentioned for this year as well. And it will count for the bonus. <i>I'll bring the job description to read it one more time.</i></p> <p>(TEXT 1)</p>

The repetition of negative quantifiers (*nu, nimic, nici – no, nothing*) amplifies the feeling of guilt in the subordinates. This allows the chairperson to further formulate an indirect threat as a punishment.

Conclusions

The constant balance between power and politeness strategies, seen from a communicative-pragmatic point of view, implies both the encoding and the decoding processes, and gives the emotive dimension of argumentative dialogue in workplace meetings. The analysis of two Romanian workplace meetings revealed that the chairperson makes use of different emotive argumentative strategies in order to maintain equilibrium between power and collegiality.

The main strategies that were discussed and exemplified in this paper are: *balance between expressions of power and solidarity, description of emotions, illuminating narratives, asking for participants' opinions, appeal to rules and regulations.* Efficiency seems to be the key-word in deciding which strategies fit best in the particular context of every meeting. In order to be effective, any strategy requires certain communicative skills in the encoding and the decoding processes used by participants.

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