The effect of hedges and certainty markers on the perceived quality of a manager

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This study looks at the effect of uncertainty markers and certainty markers on the perceived quality of a manager. Earlier research has shown the influence of hedges, but not a lot of research has been done on certainty markers. The focus on internal communication in an organizational context is new in the field. Three versions of a message were used, differing in linguistic markers. Quality was measured with authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability. An experiment with a between-subjects design done by 97 students showed no significant effects of the version on the perceived quality. Although not significant, the data indicated that authoritativeness, trustworthiness and competence were given the highest score when the message without markers was read and the lowest score when the message with uncertainty markers was read. Sociability was also perceived highest when the message without markers was read, but was perceived lowest when the message with certainty markers was read. The current study has several limitations, so future research done differently might contribute significant results in this field.

Keywords: hedges, certainty markers, perceived quality, internal communication, manager

Theoretical framework

Regarding both spoken and written communication, the formulation of a message can be of great influence. It can influence the perception that the receiver has about the sender of the message for example, on which this study will focus. Many components of language are responsible for the formulation. The linguistic aspect that will be researched in the current study, is powerful- or powerless language. In the field, most research has been done about powerless language, which can be identified by markers of uncertainty. Powerful language has in many studies been defined as a neutral form of language, or as the absence of markers. This classification has often been made in earlier work (Blankenship & Craig, 2007, p. 29). Whether certainty or uncertainty is expressed in a message, can influence the receiver's perception of the sender of the message (Hosman, 1989). In the workplace, this can contribute to the relationships within an organization. This study will use three messages, varying in language and supposedly sent out by a manager. Then, the perception of this manager will be analysed. Specifically, the research includes four variables to test perception: authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager.

First of all, it is important to zoom in on what exactly uncertain and certain language is and what it looks like. Uncertain language can occur when markers of uncertainty are used. Hedges are an important type of uncertainty marker and the current research will focus on this type of marker. Hedges are described as "words used to modify the meaning of a statement by commenting on the uncertainty of the information or on the uncertainty of the writers", (Durik, Britt, Reynolds, & Storey, 2008, p. 2). Examples of hedges are 'probably', 'possibly' and 'kind of' (Durik, Britt, Reynolds, & Storey, 2008). Several researchers have looked at the influence of this type of uncertainty marker on the perception of a message, for example Hosman (1989), Smith, Siltanen, & Hosman (1998) and Hosman & Siltanen (2011). However, the evaluation of hedges in a managerial context has not been looked at yet.

After clarifying uncertain language in the context of this study, a clarification is needed for certain language as well. In order to do so, different approaches to distinguish types of language will be briefly discussed. Previous research has distinguished between powerful and powerless speech, in which powerful speech is considered to be "lacking any elements of powerless speech" (Hosman & Siltanen, 2006, p.36). This is also seen in the research of Bradac, Hemphill, & Tardy (1981), with powerful style containing no hedges, intensifiers, polite forms, hesitation forms or deictic phrases. Other research on speech styles (Bradac & Mulac, 1984) examines the effect of different language styles. Instead of just

looking at uncertainty markers, also markers of powerful speech, like intensifiers, were included in the study. With this knowledge, this research will distinguish three forms of language. The variations in speech style that will be used are described as uncertain language, neutral language and certain language. Markers of certainty are tested less frequently in earlier research compared to markers of uncertainty. However, an example of expressing certain language can be the word 'undoubtedly', which was used in earlier research on certainty markers. Rubin, Liddy, & Kando (2006, p. 4) created a categorization model and an analytical framework to identify certainty. One of the markers that functions to express certainty was the word undoubtedly.

Having described the variable of language, it is crucial to define and justify the chosen variables that together will form the perception of the manager. The chosen variables are authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability. Most of these qualities, authoritativeness, competence and sociability have been tested before in earlier research. The following paragraphs will further comment on these investigations. Trustworthiness was not explicitly researched before in relation to uncertainty/certainty markers, but it nevertheless is a quality that a manager should possess. Besides, these variables were chosen based on assumptions about what qualities a manager should possess, as can be read in for example the editorial of Turk (2007).

Earlier research (Hosman, 1989) has found that hedges lower evaluations of authoritativeness. This finding corresponds with another research (Smith, Siltanen, & Hosman, 1998) that looked at the effect of speaker expertise and linguistic features on impression formation and attitude change. In terms of impression formation, the authoritativeness of the speaker was evaluated. It showed that using hedges affects speakers with high expertise more negatively than speakers with low expertise. Therefore, the assumption can be made that high expertise speakers are expected to exhibit a high power style. This finding is interesting for the current research, as a manager is seen as a person with high expertise. The research of Hosman (1989) also looked at the perceived sociability of the speaker, and found that hedges did not have an influence on sociability. Another interesting finding of this study worth mentioning is the effect on evaluation of character. Hosman (1989) defined character with the following items: honest, trustworthy and competent. It is therefore a combination of the variables trustworthiness and competence, which we are used in the current research. Like sociability, hedges did not influence the evaluation for character. However, the context of the message and the relationships between the sender and receiver

are different in this earlier research and the recent study. The research of Hosman (1989) used a witness' description of an accident as a message, while a message from a manager is used in the current research. The difference in context could lead to different findings.

Research done by Hosman & Siltanen (2006) investigated the effect of hedges, amongst other language forms, on speaker evaluation, amongst other dependent variables. In the research, speaker evaluation consisted of three factors, one of them was the intellectual-competence factor. This factor has the following components: intelligent, fast, knowledgeable and competent. The research indicated that a speaker using hedges was perceived as significantly less intellectually competent opposed to using a powerful style, which in this research meant no markers of uncertainty. The message used in this research was a criminal-trial transcript. It is important to notice that this context differs from the context of the current research.

Another research (Hosman & Siltanen, 2011) has looked at the effect of hedges on the competence of the speaker. In this study, competence consists of the following four components: likeable, competent, knowledgeable, and trustworthy. In this research, hedges did not provide significant effects, which is inconsistent to the study mentioned above (Hosman & Siltanen, 2006), which showed that hedges do have a negative influence on intellectual competence. However, the components of the variable competence varied between the two studies. This could explain the difference in findings on competence. The message used in the research of Hosman & Siltanen (2011) was informative, with no specific hierarchical relationships.

The variable competence has been tested before in an organizational context. Results of this research (Parton, Siltanen, Hosman, & Langenderfer, 2002) show that the evaluation of competence is more positive when a powerful speech style is used. This could give a direction of outcomes for the current study. However, it is important to note that the subjects did not evaluate a manager, but a person applying for a job interview. The hierarchical relationship therefore is different in the current study than it is in the study of Parton, Siltanen, Hosman, & Lnagenderfer (2002).

As mentioned before, most studies define powerful language as the use of no markers. However, the study of Bradac & Mulac (1984) was also focused on the effect of certainty markers, or intensifiers. The study showed that messages with intensifiers were judged relatively powerful, effective and likely to fulfil the communicator's intention. For our study,

this could give an indication that the manager using certainty markers would score high on authoritativeness, as it can be linked to being powerful. Also, the study might indicate that the manager using certainty markers would score high on competence, because effectiveness can be related to competence.

To the best of our knowledge, the studies mentioned above conducted the research with English messages, and L1 English speakers. Speakers of English as a second language were not explicitly mentioned. However, the subjects in this research will all be L2 speakers of English. If consistent results will be found, it would be interesting and useful to state that the earlier observed effect is also found under L2 speakers. The reason for that is the common use of the English language in organizations. English is a global lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339) which often serves as a contact language between people who do not share a common native language. Therefore, including subjects who are L2 speakers of English is highly relevant for today's globalized organizational landscape.

Quite some research has been done about the effect of powerless and powerful speech. However, no research has conducted the study in a managerial context. Furthermore, most research used two levels for powerful language: one of them including hedges, one of them including no hedges. The current study will also look at certainty markers. Therefore, the current research will not only retest the variables of earlier research, but will also contribute to this field of research due to the new aspects, most importantly the organizational context and the testing of three different linguistic versions of the message. Besides this scientific relevance, the research is relevant for society, above all for companies and businesses. For managers individually and for organizational cultures in general, the perception of specific linguistic features in a text could help the decision making around internal communication.

To conduct a study on this topic, an experiment will be done to answer the following research question: "How do certainty and uncertainty markers influence the perception of a manager when using these markers in informative emails addressed to employees?"

Based on the knowledge of earlier research, and on our own expectations, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H_1: Hedges will lead to lower evaluations of authoritativeness compared to no markers and certainty markers, while certainty markers will lead to higher evaluations of authoritativeness compared to hedges or to no markers.

H$_2$: Hedges will lead to lower evaluations of competence compared to no markers and certainty markers, while certainty markers will lead to higher evaluations of competence compared to hedges or to no markers.

Furthermore, sub questions are formulated for the variables which do not have expected results yet:

RQ$_1$: To what extent will hedges and certainty markers have an effect on the evaluations of trustworthiness of the manager?

RQ$_2$: To what extent will hedges and certainty markers have an effect on the evaluations of sociability of the manager?

Method

Materials

The independent variable of our research is the level of certainty or power in language. This variable consists of three different levels, powerless language, neutral language and powerful language. The stimulus material therefore consisted of three different versions of a message. This message was supposedly written by a manager of an international organization. Each version of the message differed in the language markers, which operationalised the variable. So, one version contained markers of uncertainty, the second version contained no markers and the third version contained markers of certainty. The message was written by a manager of an international company, with the aim to inform employers about the current situation concerning COVID-19. Both emails with markers contained 8 markers. The used markers of uncertainty were: could, possibly, probably, potentially, might and may. The used markers of certainty were: surely, definitely, certainly and clearly. Similar to the research of Hosman (1989), the manager's gender has not been mentioned, "in order to reduce the likelihood of gender stereotyping by subjects". Appendix 1 shows the three different versions of the message that were used.

Subjects

In total, 97 participants were included in the research, of which 58 participants were women and 39 participants were men. The Mean age was 21.62 (SD = 1.63).

The students had to be between 18 and 30 years old, and had to know English as their second language. Students from regular universities and both universities of applied sciences have been asked to participate. The choice for this target group is based on the relatively good accessibility, since a lot of subjects were needed. To decrease the occurrence of outcomes that are caused by individual differences, a sample size of at least 30 people per text type has been chosen. This lead to a minimum of 30 x 3 = 90 subjects in total. The division of gender for the participants for the version with no markers was 17 females and 13 males, with a Mean age of 21.50 (SD = 1.28) For the version with certainty markers, the division was 23 females and 10 males, with a Mean age of 21.36 (SD = 1.62). For the version with uncertainty markers, the division was 18 females and 16 males, with a Mean age of 21.97 (SD = 1.88). Students were considered a good population group to analyse and judge messages given by someone who is on a higher hierarchical level than they are. This occurs in professor-student relationships, but can also be experienced in the setting of a job. Because of this, it is expected that the research can be generalized to the population. Or more specifically, real employees of an international organization.

Design

A between-subjects design was used, meaning that each participant was only be exposed to one text. In total there were three groups, of which one group was the control group, analysing the message with neutral language (no markers). There was one independent variable, the type of language, which has three levels: uncertainty markers, no markers and certainty markers. There were four dependent variables: authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability. An analytical model was included below.

Independent variables	**Dependent variables**
Type of language (uncertain, neutral, certain)	Authoritativeness
	Trustworthiness
	Competence
	Sociability
Nominal	*Interval*

Instruments

Each participant was asked to fill out the survey after having read the message. In the survey, questions were asked to find out the perception which the subjects had of the manager. The perception consists of four dependent variables. These are authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability.

Every variable contains several components, which each were linked to a specific statement in the survey that the subjects responded to using a five-point Likert scale. To calculate the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's α was used.

The statements to test the variables were the following:

- Authoritativeness
  - The manager seems powerful.
  - The manager seems authoritative.
  - The manager seems confident.
  - The manager seems strong.
- Trustworthiness
  - I trust the manager.
  - The manager seems reliable.
  - The manager seems honest.
- Competence
  - The manager seems competent.
  - The manager seems knowledgeable
- Sociability
  - The manager seems pleasant
  - The manager seems likable
  - The manager seems good-natured
  - The manager seems sociable

Authoritativeness, trustworthiness and sociability were measured in the present study using the scales developed by Hosman (1989). Competence was measured in the present study using the components that were both used in the studies of Hosman & Siltanen (2006) and Hosman & Siltanen (2011).

To test the inter-item reliability of the dependent variables, Cronbach's Alpha was tested. The reliability of 'authoritativeness' comprising four items was good: α = .86.

Consequently, the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'authoritativeness', which was used in the further analyses. The reliability of 'trustworthiness' comprising three items was good: α = .84. Consequently, the mean of all three items was used to calculate the compound variable 'trustworthiness', which was used in the further analyses. The reliability of 'competence' comprising two items was good: α = .85. Consequently, the mean of the two items was used to calculate the compound variable 'competence', which was used in the further analyses. The reliability of 'sociability' comprising four items was good: α = .90. Consequently, the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'sociability', which was used in the further analyses.

For every statement, the participant had to choose one of the seven options of the Likert scale, which came with the following meaning: 1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Somewhat disagree, 4. Neither agree nor disagree, 5. Somewhat agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree. A seven-point Likert scale was chosen due to the high reliability (Colman, Norris, & Preston, 1997, p. 356).

After the answers were given to the statements, additional questions were asked. The subjects were asked to rate the English level of the manager on a level of 1 to 10, where 1 was defined as very poor and 10 as perfect. Also, the participants were asked whether or not the email sounded natural. The subjects were also asked to rate their own level of English, using also a 1 to 10 scale. Subsequently, the participants were asked what they thought the purpose of the study was. Furthermore, age and gender were asked. All of the data named above were considered important because it could help explain the obtained results. The level of English of the participants, the trustworthiness of the message and demographical characteristics could all influence the perception.

Procedure

An online questionnaire was used, that was distributed with the use of social media. No financial reward was given, but to motivate the subjects to take part, the importance of their participation and the short amount of time required was emphasized in an introductory part. Next to that, further information, rules and data were given. Participants also had to give consent after reader this. After that, the subjects were told what was expected of them. The text asked them to read an email and imagine as if the manager who wrote the message, was their actual manager and evaluate this person afterwards. Besides the different versions of the

message, the procedure was the same for all subjects. After the questions of the survey were asked, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or leave comments. When the participants finished the survey, the end of the questionnaire was indicated and the participants were thanked again for participating. On average, participating in the experiment took around 10 minutes. The experiment was conducted on an individual basis. External factors that might have played a role were distractions of any kind while reading the message or answering to the statements.

Results

In this section, results will be shared to contribute to answers on the research question: "What is the effect of certainty and uncertainty markers on how managers are perceived?" Specifically, the hypotheses mentioned before will be tested and the research questions will be answered.

H_1: Hedges will lead to lower evaluations of authoritativeness compared to no markers and certainty markers, while certainty markers will lead to higher evaluations of authoritativeness compared to hedges or to no markers.

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of markers in the email on the perception of authoritativeness (F (2,94) = 1.87, p = .160). Data of this variable can be found in table 1.

H_2: Hedges will lead to lower evaluations of competence compared to no markers and certainty markers, while certainty markers will lead to higher evaluations of competence compared to hedges or to no markers.

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of markers in the email on the perception of competence (F (2,94) = 2.13, p = .125).

RQ_1: To what extent will hedges and certainty markers have an effect on the evaluations of trustworthiness of the manager?

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of markers in the email on the perception of trustworthiness (F (2,94) = 2.04, p = .136).

RQ2: To what extent will hedges and certainty markers have an effect on the evaluations of sociability of the manager?

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of markers in the email on the perception of sociability (F (2,94) = 1.82, p = .168).

Although the findings of the one-way analyses of variance are not significant, trends can be seen in the data, as can be seen in table 1. The dependent variables authoritativeness, trustworthiness and competence were perceived the lowest when the participant read the email with uncertainty markers. For sociability, the version with certainty markers was perceived the lowest. All four variables were perceived the highest, when the participant read the email with no markers.

Table 1.   *Means and standard deviations for rated aspects of a manager based on the version, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree*

	No markers n = 30 M (SD)	Certainty markers n = 33 M (SD)	Uncertainty markers n = 34 M (SD)
Authoritativeness	5.27 (.93)	5.06 (1.24)	4.73 (1.18)
Trustworthiness	5.54 (.68)	5.30 (1.16)	5.06 (.96)
Competence	5.30 (1.2)	4.97 (1.25)	4.63 (1.41)
Sociability	5.23 (.95)	4.74 (.97)	4.86 (1.17)

Because of the lack of significant results, the hypotheses cannot be confirmed and the questions cannot be answered, but directions can still be given with the information of table 1. Expectations of H1 were partly correct, uncertainty markers caused the lowest level of authoritativeness. However, no makers caused a higher perception of authoritativeness than certainty markers did. This was the same for H2, were the variable of competence was tested. A direction for RQ1 would be that using no markers caused the highest evaluated level of trustworthiness, followed by the use of certainty markers and was lowest with the use of uncertainty markers. A direction for RQ2 would be that using no markers caused the highest evaluated level of sociability, followed by the use of uncertainty makers and was lowest with the use of certainty markers.

To check whether the email still sounded natural, a statistical test was done. This was of importance because it might help explain limitations or factors that might influence the study. A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between the version of the email and whether the email sounded natural ($\chi2$ (2) = 6.217, p = .045). Participants who read the version with certainty markers (24.7%) significantly reported the email to sound less natural compared to the participants who read the version without markers (35.6%) and with uncertainty markers (37.0%). See table 2 for all percentages.

Table 2.   *Percentages of answers to the question whether the email sounded natural, for each version*

	No markers n = 30	Certainty markers n = 33	Uncertainty markers n = 34
Yes	35.6%	27.4%	37.0%
No	16.7%	54.2%	29.2%

To check whether the use of markers had an effect on the perceived level of English of the manager, a statistical test was done. This was of importance because it could be an interesting variable to look at besides the main variables that were tested. A perception of a low English level could have a relation with a negative perception of quality. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect on the rated level of English of the manager (F (2,92) = .34, p = .713). The level of English was rated between 7.36 and 7.63, as can be seen in table 3, with the version with no markers having the highest score.

Table 3.   *Means and standard deviations for rated level of English of the manager, where 1 = very poor and 10 = perfect*

	No markers n = 30 *M (SD)*	Certainty markers n = 33 *M (SD)*	Uncertainty markers n = 32 *M (SD)*
English level of the manager	7.63 (1.56)	7.36 (1.2)	7.59 (1.46)

Conclusion

The current study did not find any significant differences regarding the perception of the manager. In other words, this study did not identify a significant effect of certainty or uncertainty markers on how managers are perceived. Accordingly, no hypotheses can be confirmed and no questions can be answered. However, the data does give an indication. Although not significantly confirmable, some parts of the hypotheses are aiming at the right direction. Also, although not significantly confirmable, indications can be given for answers to the research questions. For both authoritativeness and competence, it is true that hedges lead to lower evaluations. However, certainty markers do not lead to higher evaluations than versions with no markers for both variables. With regard to the evaluation of trustworthiness, both hedges and certainty markers caused a lower score compared to the email without markers. The email containing hedges lead to the lowest score for trustworthiness as well. For sociability, both hedges and certainty markers lead to a lower score compared to the email without markers, although the sociability score was lower for the email containing certainty markers.

With regard to the other aspects that were tested, it can be said that the email containing certainty markers did not sound as natural as the email without markers and the email with uncertainty markers. This could partly explain, at least for the version for certainty markers, that there were no significant results. If a message does not sound natural, positive evaluations might become more moderate. No significant difference was found between the evaluated ratings of level of English of the manager. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn about these results.

Discussion

Reflecting on earlier studies, significant results would have been expected. In particular the studies of Hosman (1989) and Hosman & Siltanen (2006) were the basis of the hypotheses of the current study. However, the current research did not show the same results. A reason for this may be the difference in context, regarding the participants and materials. The situations of the researches of Hosman (1989) and Hosman & Siltanen (2006) were different than the situation of the current research, since these researches were not conducted in an organizational setting. The study of Hosman (1989) used witness' descriptions of an accident, the study of Hosman & Siltanen (2006) used criminal transcripts. This difference causes the

interpersonal relationships between the participant and the sender of the message to be different as well. Opinions of participants are based on different information about the context they received in the studies and this could explain the different findings. However, the research of Parton, Siltanen, Hosman & Langenderfer (2002) had a somewhat similar setting to the current study, both taking place in an organizational atmosphere. Nonetheless, the difference with this study were the hierarchical relationships. All these differences could be the reason that similar findings were not found.

The current study had several limitations. The first one could be the selection of students as participants. This causes absence of a real relationship between the manager who sends out the email and the person evaluating the message. Although it was expected that it would not be a problem to let students evaluate the message, it might have been an issue. It might have caused disinterest for the participants. Besides, it might be the case that the message did not concern the participants enough to pay close attention. When something is of great importance to someone, the participant will probably take the survey more serious. In that case, answers might have been more extreme in order to deliver a true opinion. If it is not important to the participants, they might fill in moderate answers because no strong opinion is formed in their minds. An example of a method which used a message that was important to the participants is the one of Blankenship & Holtgraves (2005). This study used a message about final exams of the participants' major programs, which is important for the participants. This could be taken into account in further research. Another limitation that may exist in this research is that the differences between the three different versions of the email were not big enough. If more markers were used, differences might have had a greater chance of being significant. Another limitation could be related to the content of a message. In this study, a message was used that described the current societal and organizational situation due to the Corona virus. This information is quite objective. If the email would have contained more personal information, evaluations might have been significantly different. When reading a more unexpected or more subjective message, opinions and therefore evaluations might be stronger.

A suggestion for future research would be a study within an organisation, with actual employees as participants. This would make the context better and might lead to a higher chance of significant results. That way, participants could understand the interpersonal relationship better and the message might have been of greater importance to them. This could lead to a more active participation and stronger opinions. The indications of the current

research may be confirmed. An element of the study that should be taken into account is the material. Choosing for a more subjective message might be a better option when looking at evaluations of language use. In this way, differences between the versions may be bigger as well.

This study aimed to contribute findings in the field of hedges and certainty markers. No significant differences have been found in the current research. Further research, when done in different conditions and limitations have been taken into account, can further investigate this topic.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.   The messages that have been used: the version with no markers, the version with certainty markers and the version with uncertainty markers

EMAIL WITHOUT MARKERS:

Dear colleagues,

The situation:
The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a worldwide pandemic. The authorities have ordered far-reaching protective measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 until at least mid-April.
For our travel agency, this has consequences, both internally and externally. The external consequences will be:
- Flights are cancelled, which means that we will lose clients.
- Given that most hotels are currently dealing with a very high cancellation rate, we will lose a large part of the reservations costs already paid to hotels

What we can do internally:

In order for this crisis to pass as quickly as possible, we have to take some measures. Encounters/meetings with more than 2 persons are prohibited by national authorities. Considering this and other lockdown conditions, we are all asked to contribute to the decrease of the infection rate by staying at home – as you already know.

How to conquer the challenge:
Please take any chances during your home office time to stay interconnected and to stay in touch with our customers and business partners.
For that, please make yourself familiar with virtual communication tools, such as WebEx, skype business, MS Teams, …
Please make sure to contribute in your regular online team meetings and share relevant information. This way we will be able to continue most operations.

We will not be getting back to normal work any time soon.

Please feel free to contact me in case you might have any questions or ideas on how to improve and overcome the current challenge.

Thank you for your contribution and your comprehension.

Sincerely,
[Name of the manager]

EMAIL WITH CERTAINTY MARKERS:

Dear colleagues,

The situation:
The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a worldwide pandemic. The authorities have ordered far-reaching protective measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 until at least mid-April.
For our travel agency, this ==surely== has consequences, both internally and externally. The external consequences will ==definitely== be:
- Flights are cancelled, which ==certainly== means that we will lose clients.
- Given that most hotels are currently dealing with a very high cancellation rate, we will ==definitely== lose a large part of the reservations costs already paid to hotels.

What we can do internally:

In order for this crisis to pass as quickly as possible, we ==clearly== have to take some measures. Encounters/meetings with more than 2 persons are prohibited by national authorities. Considering this and other lockdown conditions, we are all asked to contribute to the decrease of the infection rate by staying at home – as you ==surely== already know.

How to conquer the challenge:
Please take any chances during your home office time to stay interconnected and to stay in touch with our customers and business partners.
For that, please make yourself familiar with virtual communication tools, such as WebEx, skype business, MS Teams, …
Please make sure to contribute in your regular online team meetings and share relevant information. This way we will ==definitely== be able to continue most operations.

We will ==definitely== not be getting back to normal work any time soon.

Please feel free to contact me in case you might have any questions or ideas on how to improve and overcome the current challenge.

Thank you for your contribution and your comprehension.

Sincerely,
[Name of the manager]

EMAIL WITH UNCERTAINTY MARKERS:

Dear colleagues,

The situation:
The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a worldwide pandemic. The authorities have ordered far-reaching protective measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 until at least mid-April.
For our travel agency, this ==could== have consequences, both internally and externally. The external consequences will ==possibly== be:
- Flights are cancelled, which ==probably== means that we will lose clients.
- Given that most hotels are currently dealing with a very high cancellation rate, we will ==potentially== lose a large part of the reservations costs already paid to hotels

What we can do internally:

In order for this crisis to pass as quickly as possible, we ==might== have to take some measures. Encounters/meetings with more than 2 persons are prohibited by national authorities. Considering this and other lockdown conditions, we are all asked to contribute to the decrease of the infection rate by staying at home – as you ==may== already know.

How to conquer the challenge:
Please take any chances during your home office time to stay interconnected and to stay in touch with our customers and business partners.
For that, please make yourself familiar with virtual communication tools, such as WebEx, skype business, MS Teams, …
Please make sure to contribute in your regular online team meetings and share relevant information. This way we will ==probably== be able to continue most operations.

We ==will probably not== be getting back to normal work any time soon.

Please feel free to contact me in case you might have any questions or ideas on how to improve and overcome the current challenge.

Thank you for your contribution and your comprehension.

Sincerely,
[Name of the manager]

Appendix 2.   Statement of own work

Student name: Ellen Martens

Student number: s1000394

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (http://www.ru.nl/stip/english/rules-regulations/fraud-plagiarism/) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words.

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature:

Place and date: Nijmegen, 08-06-2020