Course Book

CONVERSATION MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

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INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

CONVERSATION MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

MASTHEAD

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Ms. Trautwein is Professor of Business Psychology at IU International University.

She studied psychology with a focus on communication psychology, consulting and training, as well as industrial, business and organizational psychology at the University of Hamburg. In 2014, she received her PhD in academic teaching skills from the Faculty of Behavioral Sciences at Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg.

Subsequently, Ms. Trautwein taught at the Schulz von Thun Institute on Hamburg communication psychology. She then conducted research on higher-education teaching and learning in various externally funded projects at the Center for Higher and Continuing Education at the University of Hamburg. Since 2004, she has worked as a freelance communication trainer and consultant, including as a speaker at the Schulz von Thun Institute for Communication. She also teaches on topics related to higher-education didactics and has been part of the "living well" project in Shanghai, China since 2020.

Ms. Trautwein's research areas include interpersonal communication, competence and identity development, as well as coaching and counseling methods.

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SIGNPOSTS THROUGHOUT THE COURSE BOOK

This course book contains the core content for this course. Additional learning materials can be found on the learning platform, but this course book should form the basis for your learning.

The content of this course book is divided into units, which are divided further into sections. Each section contains only one new key concept to allow you to quickly and efficiently add new learning material to your existing knowledge.

At the end of each section of the digital course book, you will find self-check questions. These questions are designed to help you check whether you have understood the concepts in each section.

For all modules with a final exam, you must complete the knowledge tests on the learning platform. You will pass the knowledge test for each unit when you answer at least 80% of the questions correctly.

When you have passed the knowledge tests for all the units, the course is considered finished and you will be able to register for the final assessment. Please ensure that you complete the evaluation prior to registering for the assessment.

Good luck!

BASIC READING

Adler, R. B., Rodman, G. R., & du Pré, A. (2017). *Understanding human communication* (13th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Communication in the real world: An introduction to communication studies. (2016). University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing. http://search.ebscohost.com.pxz.iubh.de:8080/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsotl&AN=edsotl.OTLid0000274&site=eds-live&scope=site

Hargie, O. (2017). *Skilled interpersonal communication: Research, theory and practice* (6th ed.). Routledge. http://search.ebscohost.com.pxz.iubh.de:8080/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2939633&site=eds-live&scope=site

REQUIRED READING

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Dragojevic, M. & Giles, H. (2014). Language and interpersonal communication: Their intergroup dynamics. In C. R. Berger (Ed.), *Interpersonal communication: Handbooks of communication science* (Vol. 6, pp. 29–51). De Gruyter Mouton. http://search.ebscohost.com.pxz.iubh.de:8080/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat05114a&AN=ihb.50752&site=eds-live&scope=site

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UNIT 5

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UNIT 7

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UNIT 8

Pandey, V. K., Shukla, R., & Pandey, S. (2022). The importance of presentation skills for employability. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills, 16*(1), 31–36. http://search.ebscohost.com.pxz.iubh.de:8080/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bsu&AN=157157969&site=eds-live&scope=site

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FURTHER READING

All sources can be found in the library databases unless otherwise indicated.

UNIT 1

Coffelt, T. A., Grauman, D., & Smith, F. L. M. (2019). Employers' perspectives on workplace communication skills: The meaning of communication skills. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly, 82*(4), 418–439. http://search.ebscohost.com.pxz.iubh.de:8080/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1234019&site=eds-live&scope=site

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Polin, B. (2018). The leadership exploration project: Development and analysis of a leader definition and persuasive presentation. *Management Teaching Review, 4*(2), 119–137. http://search.ebscohost.com.pxz.iubh.de:8080/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbas&AN=edsbas.D80848C9&site=eds-live&scope=site

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Wherever humans are present, communication is present. As a human, you know a lot about communication from personal experiences. In this course, **conversation management and communication techniques**, we will provide you with scientific concepts and theories to enrich your knowledge and support you to become a more competent communicator.

First, we will start off by defining and characterizing communication and communication competence. Second, we will explore different types of communication and different verbal and nonverbal modalities of communication. Third, we will discuss perception as the fundamental psychological process underlying communication and the cause of many communicative challenges. Forth, we will look into various communication skills and techniques to foster your communicative proficiency. Fifth, you will learn that communication forms an organization, and workplace communication is fundamental for organizational success and staff wellbeing. Sixth, we will examine strategies that enable you to shape relationships, handle self-disclosure, present content, employ influence, and facilitate problem solving to foster your communication management skills. Seventh, you will learn that however competently we communicate, difficulties and conflicts will arise. We need to understand and manage them well to maintain healthy relationships. We will close this course by investigating how a well-planned public speech or social media presence can reach the purpose of public communication which is persuasion or information.

UNIT 1

BASICS OF COMMUNICATION

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to...

- define communication.
- describe the character of communication.
- depict three models of communication.
- elaborate on the different functions of communication.
- explain communication competence.

1. BASICS OF COMMUNICATION

Introduction

Wherever humans are present, communication is present. This makes it an omnipresent phenomenon. Despite its omnipresence, communication is a concept that cannot be easily grasped and defined, as you will see in the definition section. After defining and describing the characteristics of communication, you will be introduced to three attempts to model the communication process. Based on these fundamentals, we will then explore what constitutes communication competence.

1.1 Defining and Characterizing Communication

In the following section, we will explore the reason communication is difficult to define and describe its characteristics.

Defining Communication

Everyone has knowledge of communication and experienced it because wherever there are humans, communication is also there. This makes every human a stakeholder, and to some degree, an expert in this field (Greene, 2021). However, when we talk about communication in a scientific sense, we need to define the concept to make sure that we are, not roughly but rather exactly, talking about the same thing. In this endeavor, you may learn new vocabularies for things you have already known (Greene, 2021). Pinning down the concept of communication, however, is difficult (Hargie, 2017, p. 5). Looking at the Latin root of the verb, "to communicate" means to "to share" or "to make common". Accordingly, some have described communication as a process in which humans share their ideas, thoughts, and feelings in commonly understandable ways (Hargie, 2017, p. 5).

More precisely, human communication can be defined as "the process of creating meaning through symbolic interaction" (Adler et al., 2017, p. 5). Communication, as a process, consists of a sequence of actions that are dynamic and ongoing. These actions are initiated with the presence of at least two parties (Hargie, 2017, p. 6): the senders and the receivers of messages. The senders produce messages by encoding their cognitions, i.e., they transform their mental representations into commonly understood codes, for example words. The receivers process the messages and decode the received signs and symbols to interpret their meanings. In the process of communication, the roles of senders and receivers alter and both parties interact within the exchange of symbols and creation of meanings (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 12).

Moreover, human communication is characterized as…

Reciprocal. In a communication sequence, actions are reciprocally determined, i.e., each action affects the other actions and is affected by them (Hargie, 2017, p. 6). In this dynamic and evolving process, not only the interlocutors' behaviors but also the interlocutors themselves are reciprocally affected, as their thoughts and feelings change in the course of the interaction.

Reciprocal
This is another word for mutual.

Intersubjective. The meaning of very few messages can be objectively defined. Mostly, senders and receivers interact in the meaning-making process, i.e., they negotiate an intersubjective meaning, which is meaningful for both (Hargie, 2017, p. 5).

Intersubjective
This means accessible to both.

Inevitable. This is a point of controversy. Theorists, who adopt a broad view of what constitutes communication, argue that we communicate in all social situations where we are aware of each other's presence, as we mutually influence each other (Hargie, 2017, p. 9). Thus, one "cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick et al. 1967, p. 49). Others, who characterize communication as intentional and conscious, may distinguish between informative und communicative behaviors. A sigh may communicate that we are frustrated by our interlocutor's message. But it may also be an unintentional sign that our legs are still sore due to yesterday's workout (Hargie, 2017, p. 9). This information may not be intended to be received.

Inevitable
This is a synonym for unavoidable.

Relational. In a communicative encounter two parties interact and both play an active part in sending and receiving. We cannot "do" communication to others; rather, we do it in relationship with them. In order to be attractive, we need someone to be attracted to us. To scare someone off, we need someone who allows themselves to be scared (Adler et al., 2017, p. 6).

Purposeful. Communication is a strategic enterprise that serves a purpose and is driven by goals. Humans communicate in order to fulfill their needs and to impact others. We may express our sadness to receive support, but we are not always aware of our intentions. Besides, the goals we pursue are not always conscious. For instance, in group settings we may have the habitual goal to encourage equal participation; and to achieve this goal we may support shyer members with eye contact to contribute. However, due to being habitual this behavior may have become automatic and unconscious (Hargie, 2017, p. 10, 18).

Multi-dimensional. Communicated messages are rarely discrete but they cover multiple aspects. The content of the messages or the topics discussed are usually obvious. However, messages also contain information about the relationship between the interlocutors. Interlocutors negotiate their relationship according to the aspects of dominance or affiliation. They manage their identity by presenting themselves in a way that influences the way their counterparts perceive them. They also receive identity-related messages that may affect their self-image reciprocally (Hargie, 2017, pp. 11–13).

Irreversible. Sometimes we would like to take a message back, but it is not possible. Due to the influential nature of communication, as soon as the message is sent, the interaction has changed and cannot be restored to the previous state. We can only then engage in damage control measures, such as apologies or explanations (Hargie, 2017, p. 13).

1.2 Modeling Communication

The character of communication is visible in models depicting the human communication process. There are linear, interactive, and transactional models of human communication.

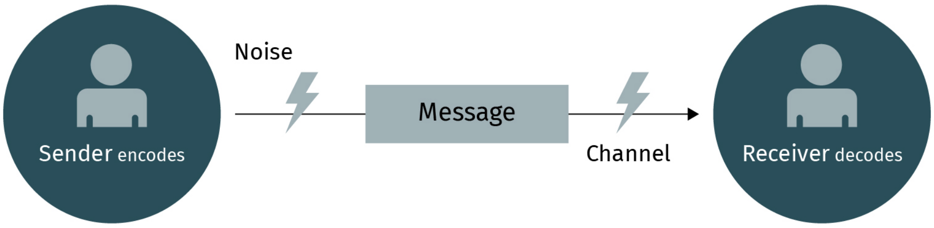
Linear communication models

The first models depicted communication as a linear, unidirectional process. The process starts with the sender encoding their inner thoughts and feelings into a message composed of symbols. The sender then transmits the message via a channel to a receiver who decodes the symbols by connecting them with a meaning (Adler et al., 2017, p. 7). These models focus on the sender, the message, its medium and the channel. They also acknowledge that noise can obstruct effective communication. Channels are the sensory routes in which the message travels, namely the vocal-auditory channel that carries speech; the gestural-visual channel that facilitates body language; the chemical-olfactory channel that accommodates smell; and the cutaneous-tactile channel that allows for touch (Communication, 2016, p. 15; Hargie, 2017, p. 7).

A message is mediated by the used means of communication, i.e., it is conveyed through a sort of communication medium. Face-to-face contact and writing are classical forms of communication. Other communication media include telephone, email, instant messaging, fax, voice mail, and video chat (Adler et al., 2017, p. 7). Face-to-face conversation is the richest media as it transmits information on all sensory channels. Phone calls or email messages provide much less information, and are thus less sensory-rich (Hargie, 2017, p. 7). Some literature does not separate channel and media, but use the terms interchangeably (Hargie, 2017, p. 7). Noise refers to a broad category of forces that can interfere with the intended reception of a message at any stage of the communication process. Disruptive noise can be external, physiological, or psychological. External or physical noise is comprised of factors that are out of the receivers' control; therefore, they distract the receivers or obstruct their hearing. Physiological noise refers to biological factors that hinder accurate reception, such as impairment, illness, or tiredness of the communicators. Psychological noise refers to the cognitive or emotional state of the communicator that disturb reception, for example, anxiety or sadness (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 7–8).

The most famous linear model, presenting a transmissive understanding of communication was proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1949). Linear models were the starting point for developing more complex models of communication. Today they are still used to analyze, for example, computer-mediated one-way communication (Communication, 2016, p. 17).

Figure 1: The Linear Communication Model



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022) based on Communication (2016, p. 16)

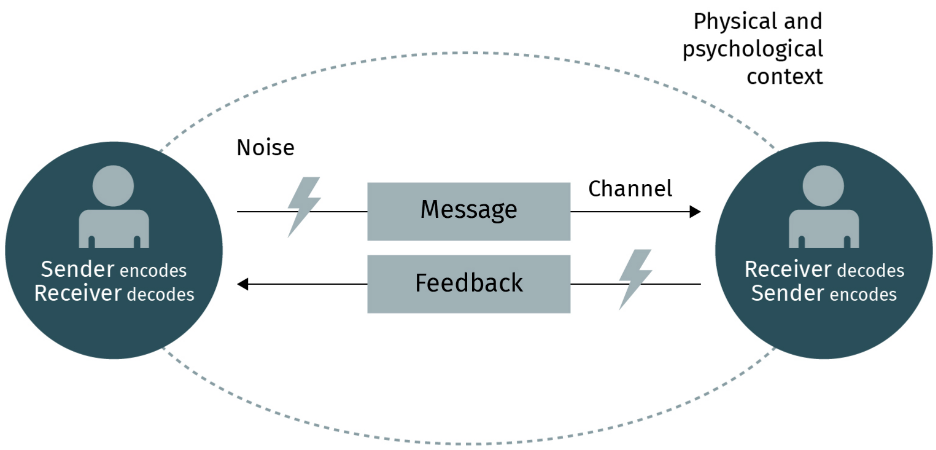
Interactive communication models

Some mass communications flow in a one-way, linear manner, but most other communications are interactive, two-way exchanges. The interaction model of communication depicts communication in this way: In order to exchange messages, the communicators alter between the roles of sender and receiver and the tasks of encoding and decoding. The sent messages are not independent from each other but are connected by feedback. Feedback is the noticeable response of a receiver to a sender's message (Adler et al., 2017, p. 10).

The interactive communication model describes communication as a sequence of discrete actions: A message is sent, feedback follows, a subsequent reaction follows, and so on (Communication, 2016, p. 21). This type of interaction occurs in physical and psychological contexts. The physical context comprises the environmental features of a communication encounter, such as room temperature, set up and lighting. The psychological context comprises the cognitive and emotional characteristics of the sender and the receiver (Communication, 2016, p. 21). The latter is also a product of the personal experiences and cultural backgrounds that the communicators bring to a conversation (Adler et al., 2017, p. 8). The more their backgrounds overlap, the more they have in common. The smaller the common ground, the more difficult communication can get (Adler et al., 2017, p. 9).

Some forms of mediated communication, such as email or text messages are more complex than the linear model suggests, but they can be analyzed well using the interaction model of communication. For instance, recall how you felt the last time you waited for the response to a text message. How did you interpret the silence? How did the feedback of silence influence your subsequent message? (Adler et al., 2017, p. 10).

Figure 2: The Interactive Communication Model



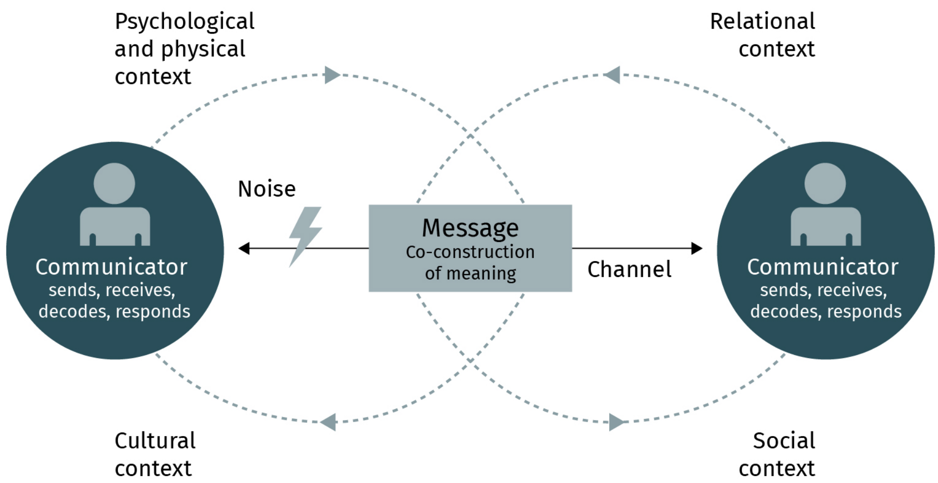
Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022) based on Communication (2016, p. 19)

Transactional communication models

Transactional
Such an action involves two parties that reciprocally affect each other.

In a face-to-face conversation, actions are not only happening sequentially but also simultaneously. While the sender is still speaking, the receiver may show a nonverbal reaction, such as yawning, causing the sender to decode the feedback and encode a new message at the same time. The **transactional** communication model acknowledges this fact by depicting sending and receiving as simultaneous, and labeling interlocutors as communicators who both send and receive messages . According to this model, some feedback may be received in the form of an encoded message. Other responses may not involve conscious encoding but are nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions or gestures. For this reason, the transactional model does not use the term “encode” but replaces it with the broader term “respond” (Adler et al., 2017, p. 10). Moreover, this model considers communication as co-construction of meaning. In the meaning-making process we don’t communicate our realities, but we construct our realities while communicating. That means that a communication encounter is not only a product of our psychological, physical, relational, social, and cultural context, but through communication encounters our contexts are shaped (Communication, 2016, p. 21). The transactional model is the most complex model of communication and can describe the complex nature of human communication most accurately. However, it is still a model aiming to describe reality and it is not reality in itself.

Figure 3: The Transactional Communication Model



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022) based on Communication (2016, p. 21)

1.3 Functions of Communication

After defining and characterizing communication, we now explore its functions. Communication is purposeful in the sense that we communicate to satisfy our needs. We speak to the shop assistant or type our request in the shopping app when we buy groceries to satisfy our physiological needs of hunger and thirst. We call a technician if the heater is not working and instruct the hairdresser on our preferred hairstyle. In doing so, we use communication to meet our practical and everyday needs (Adler et al., 2017, p. 19). Furthermore, if our life or our security is at risk, we cry out for help or call the police to meet our basic need for safety.

On a higher level, Deci and Ryan (1985) identified three universal psychological needs of humans. The first is competence as the wish to feel confident and effective when working towards our goals. The second is relatedness as the desire to have close connections and positive relationships with significant others. The third is autonomy, when we want to feel being in control of our own life, rather than being controlled by others, and be in harmony with our integrated self. We must communicate well in order to satisfy these needs. The satisfaction of all of them results in our overall well-being (Hargie, 2017, p. 2).

We desire relatedness not only because we need human interaction in order to understand who we are, but because one's self emerges and is formed in negotiations with others. Children learn who they are when their caregivers talk with and about them (Hargie, 2017, p. 2). Conversely, a person who is deprived of human communication has no sense of identity (Adler et al., 2017, p. 19). As a result, some believe that the essence of communication lies in the formation and expression of our personal identity (Hargie, 2017, p. 2).

In addition to helping define who we are, social interaction satisfies our other needs, such as our need for pleasure, affection and inclusion as opposed to loneliness, escape from unwanted tasks, relaxation, and control (in the sense of influencing others); (Adler et al., 2017, p. 19).

Communication is so crucial for the fulfillment of our needs that a lack of it endangers our health. People who feel lonely or socially isolated tend to experience symptoms such as stress, fatigue, depression, pain, and a weakened immune system. But not only their mental and physical health tends to deteriorate, but they also tend to die younger (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 18–19). In contrast, due to our "deep-seated need to communicate" the more competent we are in this domain, the more satisfying and rewarding is our life (Hargie, 2017, p. 2).

1.4 Communication Competence

Communication competence is important as it is related to a higher life quality. This presumption is based on the following axioms:

- Communication forms relationships.
- Relationships determine the quality of life; thus, communication determines the quality of life.
- The better one communicates, the greater the quality of one's relationship.
- The greater the relationship quality, the greater the quality of life.
- Therefore, the more competently one communicates, the greater one's quality of life is(Hannawah & Spitzberg, 2015, p. 4; Hargie, 2017, p. 4).

Moreover, communication competence is a sought-after professional quality in the workplace. Employers consider the ability to communicate effectively as a key criterion in recruiting new staff (Adler et al., 2017, p. 20; Hargie, 2017, p. 3).

Definitions

Although there is a general agreement on the importance of skilled or competent communication, there is no agreed upon definition (Adler et al., 2017, p. 20). According to Hargie (2018, p. 17), the adjectives "skilled" and "competent" both indicate that a person is able to communicate effectively. Considering the nouns, some use "skill", competence, and "ability" synonymously (Spitzberg, 2015, p. 244). Others differentiate between the terms and understand ability as a capacity to repeatably achieve an intended goal. Skills are the specific goal-directed behaviors that enable ability. As such, they are surface manifestations of the underlying cognitive, motivational, and physiological components of ability (Spitzberg, 2015, p. 242). As skills are observable, they can be assessed. Competence refers to the evaluation of skills regarding quality. The most common quality criteria of communication competence are appropriateness and effectiveness. Whereas appropriateness is the perceived acceptability in a given context, effectiveness refers to the degree to which a preferred outcome is achieved (Spitzberg, 2015, p. 248).

According to Schulz von Thun (2008, p. 7) the gold standard of communication is appropriate **congruency**. This concept combines situational appropriateness with personal congruency. Behaviors that meet this criterion not only fit the demands of the context but also the nature of the person who enacts them. They are not only situationally adequate but also authentic and thus they fulfill the demands of the inner self.

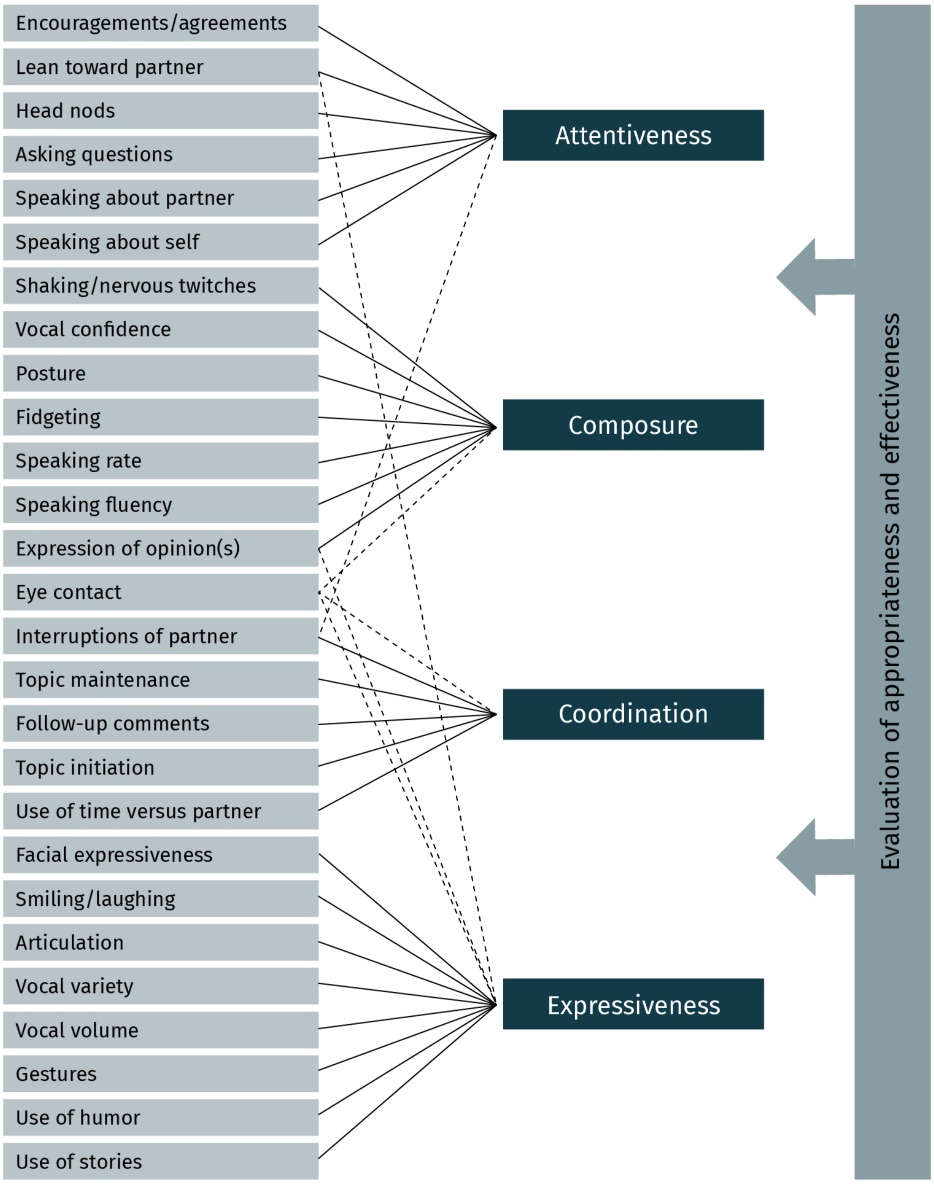
Congruency
This is another word for harmony or accordance.

Hargie defines competent communication as an interpersonal skill that "involves a process in which the individual implements a set of goal-directed, inter-related, situationally appropriate social behaviors, which are learned and controlled" (2018, p. 15).

Content of Communication Competence

As to the skills contained in communication competence, there are many different listings. Most skills, however, can be categorized to four basic clusters of attentiveness, composure, coordination, and expressiveness (Spitzberg, 2015, p. 248). Attentiveness is paying attention, showing interest in, and concern for others. Its related skills include listening and asking questions as seen in the graphic below. Composure is the state of calmness and confidence, for example through the skill of speaking fluently (as opposed to dysfluent). Coordination skills enable communicative flow, for example, by taking turns in a conversation without interrupting each other. Expressiveness skills refer to the degree of variation in verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Spitzberg, 2015, p. 248).

Figure 4: Content of Communication Competence

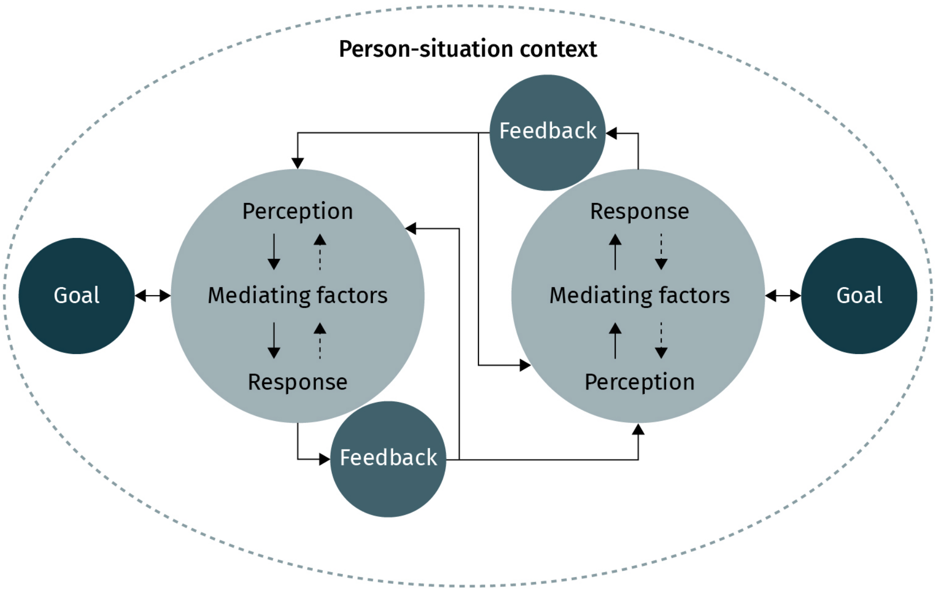


Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Spitzberg (2015, p. 255)

Process Model of Competent Communicative Performance

To depict the complex process of skilled communicative performance, Hargie (2017; 2018) presents a model based on three assumptions: The first one is that people act purposefully as they pursue goals. The second is that humans are sensitive to the effects or outcomes of their actions. And the third one is that they use the achieved information to modify subsequent actions. The model comprises six elements (Hargie, 2017, pp. 22–23, p. 40; Hargie, 2018, p. 48):

Figure 5: Process Model of Competent Communicative Performance



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022) based on Hargie, (2018, p. 44)

1. Person-situation context

The context of communication is determined by spatial, temporal, relational and sometimes organizational frameworks as well as by the attributes and characteristics of both interlocutors. The personal characteristics of the participants combined with the features of the situation shape the interaction.

2. Goals

Individuals, consciously or unconsciously, pursue goals in social interactions. These goals are shaped by personal and situational factors. In order to realize these goals, individuals develop and modify strategies.

3. Mediating processes

Emotions and cognitions mediate goals and goal-pursuing strategies. In response to them, the goals can be abandoned or changed; and the related strategies can be modified, also in light of their projected effects.

4. Responses

Once a strategy is formed and decided on, it is enacted, and it then constitutes the response.

5. Feedback

Individuals will know whether their goals are achieved or not through the feedback received from their interlocutors. Another form of feedback comes from our own self, through means of self-monitoring.

6. Perception

However, only the perceived feedback can direct further actions. This makes perception central to skillful interaction. Yet perception is highly selective and thus often inaccurate; that is why it may lead to miscommunication.

In order to be applied to the complex dynamics of human interaction, the model recognizes several interactions between the six elements. For instance, the perception of the feedback influences the mediating processes of cognitions and emotions, and interrelatedly our thoughts and feelings shape the way we perceive the feedback. This is also true regarding our response, which is the result of our beliefs and emotions. In contrast, once we decide on a response, it influences our emotional and cognitive state. Also, the two participants involved in the social interaction simultaneously send and receive information, even if one is "only" listening they will send information in the form of mimics and gestures (Hargie, 2017, p. 23).

Characteristics of a Competent Communicator

A competent communicator knows a wide repertoire of communication behaviors, is able to choose the appropriate behaviors and modify them so that they can be effectively applied to various situations (Adler et al., 2017, p. 21; Communication, 2016, p. 43). Communication situations are highly diverse due to personal and situational factors constituting them. There is not one behavior that fits all situations.

To communicate effectively, one must be flexible and carefully choose the most appropriate behavior for each given situation (Adler et al., 2017, p. 23). This implies that competent behavior has a knowledge base (Communication, 2016, p. 44), with behavioral patterns represented in our memory as conceptual schemas (Hargie, 2017, p. 34). The knowledge includes how to do something, understanding why things are done in a certain way, and when to employ a certain behavior (Hargie, 2017, p. 21). Cognitive competence can be developed by observing and evaluating the actions of others and through instruction (Communication, 2016, p. 52). Moreover, competence involves the motivation to perform skilled communication. But having knowledge and motivation is not enough. After the most appropriate communicative pattern is chosen, it needs to be put into practice and performed effectively (Adler et al., 2017, p. 23). Thus, behavior is the acid test of competence.

Empathy
It is the understanding of and emotional response to your counterpart's thoughts and feelings.

Moreover, competent communicators are characterized by **empathy**, which is required to understand the other person's point of view and develop an effective message (Adler et al., 2017, p. 23). Cognitive complexity enables the competent communicators to understand issues and people by using a variety of perspectives (Adler et al., 2017, p. 24). Competent communicators also employ self-monitoring and observe their behaviors (Adler et al., 2017, p. 24). They reflect on these observations and are motivated to improve their communication skills (Communication, 2016, p. 46). Finally, competent communicators commit to the relationships in which they communicate (Adler et al., 2017, p. 24).

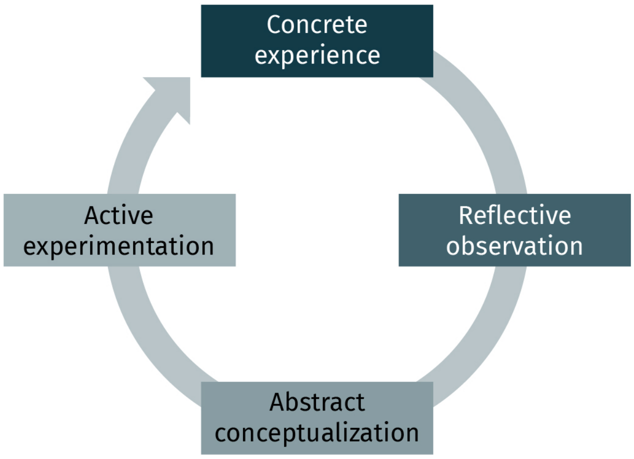
Competence Acquisition

Communication competence is learned. For instance, we are explicitly taught to speak and use verbal codes to communicate. The many conventions involved in applying socially appropriate nonverbal behaviors are more often learned implicitly by observations as well as trial and error. Often, we are competent in some areas of communication and have deficiencies in others (Communication, 2016, p. 46). Thus, communication competence is less of a trait that a person possesses or lacks. One might demonstrate a higher degree of competence in certain areas of communication but be less competent in other areas or in relationships with different people. This feature makes communication competence relational; and it is due to the transactional nature of communication, as it is not something we do to others but with them (Adler et al., 2017, p. 20).

Competence develops in stages. In the beginning, we might be unconscious incompetent, and not even aware that we are communicating in an incompetent way. Once we start to gain knowledge in an area and reflect on our related skills, we may experience conscious incompetence. We realize our deficiencies, as we know what we should do, but are still not able to perform well. Once we reach the stage of conscious competence, we monitor ourselves communicating competently. We then can use these experiences for future reference. When skilled communication becomes automatic and rather effortless, we have reached the level of unconscious competence. However, this will be true only for certain situations and people; in other rather unfamiliar areas of communication, we will be at lower stages (Hargie, 2017, p. 18; Communication, 2016, p. 46).

Competence development can be intentionally developed. If you are motivated to improve your communication skills, you can follow the experiential learning cycle (see the graphic below). Start by observing a communication encounter and by reflecting on its effectiveness: Did you achieve your goals in the conversation while maintaining or enhancing the relationship to your counterpart (Adler et al., 2017, p. 20)? In the next step, you learn from your experience and aim to broaden your knowledge about communication. You can enrich this step by gathering information, for instance through reading about communication techniques and strategies or through observing others. By these means, you will learn about behavior alternatives and expand your repertoire of communication behaviors. As there is no "one-fits-all" behavior that fits all communication situations, the next step is to pick a behavior that you assume fits the needs of the specific situation. Then you plan when to experiment with it. Hereafter you enact the behavior and thus, you create a new experience. Again, you observe yourself or request feedback from others and evaluate your behavior. In this way, you can follow the experiential learning cycle for several rounds until you are satisfied with the effectiveness of your communication behavior.

Figure 6: The Experimental Learning Cycle



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022) based on Kolb, (1984, p. 33)

SUMMARY
Through communication, humans share their ideas, thoughts, and feelings in commonly understandable ways. Communication can be defined as a process of meaning-making through interaction using symbols. The characteristics of communication can be described as reciprocal, intersubjective, inevitable, relational, purposeful, multi-dimensional, and irreversible. Three different kinds of communication models try to depict the process of human communication. The linear model's focus is on the sender and the transmission of the message. The interactive model focuses on the interaction of the sender and receiver who switch their roles. The interactional model highlights that communication is simultaneous and constructs meaning. Humans need to communicate in order to fulfill their basic, psychological, and other needs. If they communicate too little, their health and even their life are at risk. This is the reason why communication competence is associated with a higher life quality. A competent communicator can perform appropriate and effective communication behavior in various situations.

UNIT 2

FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

– differentiate between the six types of communication.
– illustrate different modalities of communication.
– describe the characteristics of language.
– define verbal and nonverbal communication competence.
– explain the significance and characteristics of nonverbal communication.
– depict different modalities of nonverbal communication.

2. FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Introduction

In this unit, you will learn to differentiate between types of communication, such as interpersonal and group communication, which are categorized based on the number of people involved. However, it is not the only criteria to characterize various forms of communication. Different modalities shape the communication situation as well. You will discover this when we look into verbal and nonverbal communication.

2.1 Types of Communication

The six main types of communication vary in terms of the number of participants involved, channels used, and contexts.

Intrapersonal Communication

This is a type of communication that takes place within a person and means talking to oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking (Adler et al., 2017, p. 10; Communication, 2016, p. 6). For instance, the little voice in our head which urges us to double-check if we have switched off the oven before leaving the house.

Internal communication influences the relationship we have with ourselves (Adler et al., 2017, p. 10). For instance, you may use self-talk to calm yourself down in a stressful situation. Also, what you think about yourself, i.e., your self-concept, is a product of your self-talk (Communication, 2016, p. 7). It also influences almost all our interactions with others (Adler et al., 2017, p. 10). Imagine, for example, the internal dialogue that starts when your new colleague looks away when you ask if you can join them at lunch break, and how that influences your next reaction.

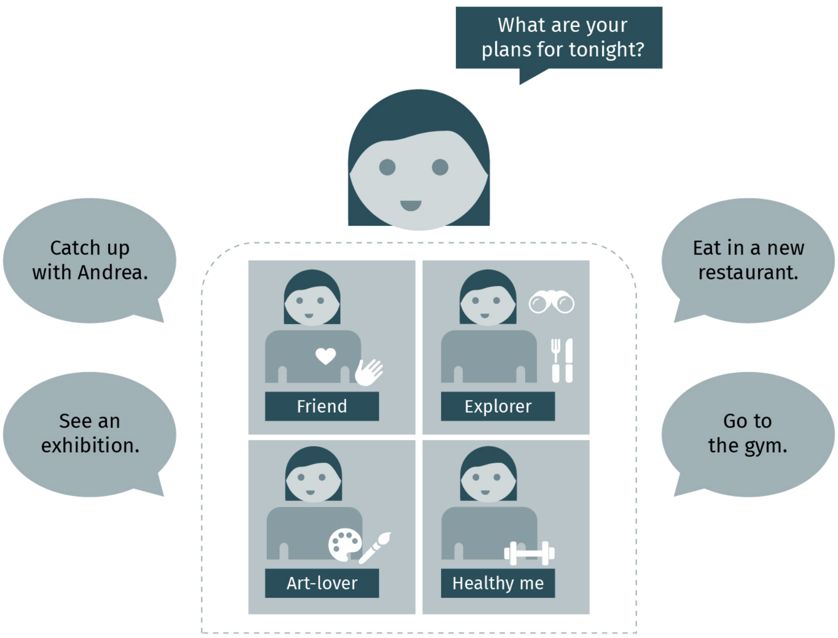
Due to this influence, Schulz von Thun (2008, p. 4; p. 20) states that self-clarification or clarification on the inside is a prerequisite for clear communication on the outside. He offers a method for inner dialogues and recommends that we develop our “inner team.” Inner team is a metaphor for our inner voices. Considering the team metaphor, there is not just one inner voice, but a choir of voices. The inner team members represent different impulses and feelings. Often the members of your inner team have conflicting interests. The inner conflict can lead to communication difficulties on the outside. However, this “inner plurality” is a human reality and nothing to worry about. As long as you are aware that the inner team members are just parts of your whole self, you don’t have to worry about developing a multiple personality disorder.

Let’s imagine, for instance, it is Friday evening and you have just received a text message form your friend Andrea asking you about your plans for tonight. As you are pondering this question and how to answer it, you hear different members of your inner team. Your social part, let’s call it the socializer, says that it wants to go out with your friend Andrea to catch up with her as it has not seen her in a while. But the art lover inside of you has heard of an art exhibition which will finish tonight and is an absolutely must see. And the explorer in your inner team would really like to try out the new Vietnamese restaurant, which is said to serve a new kind of rice noodle soup with exquisite taste. Or should you go to the gym as your healthier me suggests?

All these activities hardly fit into a single Friday night. You have to set priorities and decide against some of the options. So, you end up in the middle of making a decision with your inner team. Decision-making is not always easy, as diversity is not only applicable to work teams but also to our inner teams. There is a great deal of inner plurality and some of the options contradict each other.

In order to have a good relationship with yourself, the inner team suggests that we have to respect all the members and cater to their needs. In this way, we respect the diverse needs of our whole personality whose different parts are represented by the inner team members. If the healthier me, for example, is always overruled by the other team members, you neglect your body’s need for exercise and your health will suffer. But if you decide to go to the gym, how will this affect your relationship with your friend Andrea?

Figure 7: The Inner Team on a Friday Night



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Schulz von Thun (2008, pp. 19–22).

Your function, as the integrated self, is that of the team leader or chief. You have to talk to each team member and negotiate a decision that is agreeable to everyone. Ignored team members may then sabotage the decision, so you have to work towards full integration (Schulz von Thun, 2008, p. 21). An integrated solution could be inviting Andrea to join you in one of the suggested activities. However, you also need to allocate some time slots for activities that meet the needs of the other team members to secure their cooperation and compliance.

Interpersonal Communication

Idiosyncratic
This is another word for distinct or specific.

This is a type of communication between at least two people, and thus it is sometimes called dyadic communication. A dyad is a two-person unit which provides the context for close and intimate relationships. In this context stereotypes play a small role, as individuals consider each other as unique rather than as members of social groups. Interpersonal communication is characterized by **idiosyncratic** social rules and a high degree of information exchange (Adler et al., 2017, p. 11). It is the most common form of communication (Communication, 2016, p. 8).

Small Group Communication

This is a type of communication within small groups that allows every member to participate actively with the others. Whether small groups meet face-to-face or online, they are characterized by features that are not present in dyads: First, the different perspectives represented by each member can increase the creativity of ideas and solutions in small groups as compared to dyads. Second, if the majority puts intentional or unintentional pressure on the minority, small groups will tend to conformity and produce poorer decisions than pairs. Third, leadership influences the communication in groups (Adler et al., 2017, p. 11). Fourth, when groups come together to accomplish assigned tasks, group communication is usually more goal-oriented than interpersonal conversation (Communication, 2016, p. 11).

Organizational Communication

This is a type of communication among a more permanent structured collection of people who cooperate to achieve common goals, for example in a company (Adler et al., 2017, p. 11). The unique qualities of organizational communication, as compared to other forms of communication, involve the differences in responsibility and status assigned to roles (e.g., CEO, sales assistant, head of HR). Moreover, the different communicative connections can be depicted in networks of communication (Adler et al., 2017, p. 12).

Public Communication

This is a type of communication in very large groups in which it is not possible for all the members to contribute to communication. An unequal amount of speaking, a focus on the sender, and a limited amount of verbal feedback are characteristic of public communication (Adler et al., 2017, p. 13; Communication, 2016, p. 8). These divide the participants of public communication into speakers and the audience; for example, during a TED-talk. In such settings, however, the audience is still able to provide nonverbal feedback or ask questions, for instance.

Mass Communication

This is a type of communication mostly aimed at extremely widespread audiences without any personal contact between senders and receivers. Most of the messages in mass communication are professionally produced and carefully crafted to be transmitted to the public via electronic and print media. This is still mainly controlled by corporate media and governmental sources (Adler et al., 2017, p. 13). As mass communication is media transmitted, it is rather asynchronous due to the time lag between receiving and responding to messages. Face-to-face communication, in contrast, is synchronous as participants send and receive messages at the same time (Adler et al., 2017, p. 18). Besides, face-to-face communication is "richer," as many nonverbal cues add clarity to the verbal messages (Adler et al., 2017, p. 17).

With social media and Web 2.0 transforming the internet from a one-way medium into a "masspersonal" phenomenon, the boundary between interpersonal and mass communication is in flux. Contrary to mass media, which always targets large audiences, social media has a variable size of the target audience. For instance, some social media content may be created for a few but then go "viral" (Adler et al., 2017, p. 17).

2.2 Modalities of Communication

Spoken or written words are not the only modality of communication. As depicted in the table below, modalities of communication can be divided into four categories.

Table 1: Modalities of Communication

	Verbal	**Nonverbal**
Vocal	Spoken language (content)	Paralanguage/Vocalics (tone of voice, intonation, pitch, volume, speaking rate, etc.)
Nonvocal	Writing, sign language	Gestures, facial expressions, posture, etc.

Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Hargie (2017, p. 43).

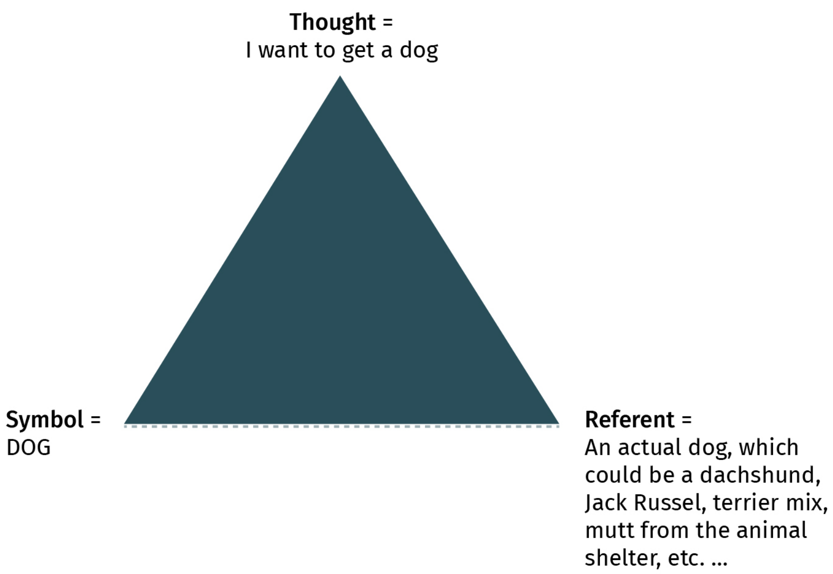
Vocal communication refers to all elements of speech that are transmitted via sound, including what is said (i.e., content) and how it is said (e.g., tone of voice, speech rate, or accent). Nonvocal communication includes all elements of communication that do not originate in the vocal cords, such as writing or body language. Verbal communication uses a defined set of words or other symbols to convey meaning. Nonverbal communication comprises all behaviors that serve a communicative purpose but do not use a defined set of codes, such as tone of voice or gestures (Hargie, 2017, p. 43).

2.3 Verbal Communication

Arbitrary
This means that there is no distinct rule, but it is rather random.

Verbal communication is rooted in language. “A language is a collection of symbols governed by rules and used to convey messages between individuals” (Adler et al., 2017, p. 96). Linguistic symbols include spoken and written words and the signs of the Sign Languages for the hearing impaired. These symbols are **arbitrary** constructions that link the thoughts of a communicator with meanings (Adler et al., 2017, p. 97). Ogden and Richards’ triangle of meaning models the relationship between a thought, a symbol (e.g., a word), and a referent (the actual thing). It highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and the thing it refers to, and it is demonstrated by a broken line as you can see in the graphic below (Adler et al., 2017, p. 97). If the communicators belong to the same speech community and the referent is figurative, as in the example with the dog, the reference may be rather clear. With abstract terms, for instance “freedom”, the relationship may be less straightforward, and it provides room for interpretation (Adler et al., 2017, p. 97).

Figure 8: Ogden and Richards’ Triangle of Meaning



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Communication (2016, p. 115).

Definitions provide meanings for symbols and narrow down a symbol’s possible referents. However, there are not only denotative meanings, which are formally recognized definitions for words, as found in dictionaries. There are also connotative meanings, which are experience-based thoughts and emotions provoking associations that people have with a term. These informal interpretations are far more significant than dictionary definitions. Consequently, the meaning of a word depends less on the term itself and more on the context and the people involved. (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 97–98; Communication, 2016, p. 115).

The Characteristics of Language

Language is governed by different rules. Phonological rules govern how sounds are combined to form words, i.e., how the pronunciation sounds. The word "champagne", for example, is spelled the same in French and English, but because the phonological rules of the two languages are different, the word sounds different in French and English. Syntactic rules govern the ways in which symbols can be arranged and determine the structure of a language, for instance the order of words in a sentence. Semantic rules govern the meanings of words. If a word has more than one meaning (for instance "guide" which can be a verb or noun), semantic misunderstandings may occur. Pragmatic rules guide the way people use language in their daily interaction and determine what people consider, for example, as offensive. For instance, asking adults their age is considered rude in Germany, whereas in China it is a feasible small talk question (Adler et al., 2017, p. 98, p. 99).

Language is learned. In the acquisition process, we learn to relate symbols to their referents and vice versa, i.e., we learn the meaning of words. Over time, we understand, produce, and employ more and more of the words used within our language group. This process happens very fast during the first two years of our life. By the time we are in our early teens, we have usually gathered all the linguistic information we need to participate in everyday conversations (Communication, 2016, p. 120).

The function of language is to express our observations, such as reports on sensory information, thoughts (ideas, conclusions, or judgments), emotions, and needs (Communication, 2016, p. 136). The wider our vocabulary range is and the more proficient we are in selecting appropriate terms, the more skilled we are at verbal expression and the better we are understood by others. For instance, to express our feelings comprehensibly, we need a well-developed range of emotional vocabulary (Communication, 2016, p. 124). Furthermore, the way we use words affects our persuasiveness, depending on how convincingly we can express and support our ideas. Language serves as a means of control as well, and can initiate powerful actions (Communication, 2016, p. 136). The right words uttered in the right situations have the potential to change the world; for instance, consider powerful speeches such as *I have a dream* by Martin Luther King.

Language also expresses and shapes our identities through labels used by and on us (Communication, 2016, p. 136). Gender-related language research could prove that children who are exposed to words such as fireman and businessman are less likely to assume that women can obtain these professions. Children exposed to gender-neutral terms like fireworker and businessperson make such assumptions to a lesser extent (Adler et al., 2017, p. 102).

Language not only describes people and things explicitly, but it also has an implicit influence on how they are perceived in areas such as competence, credibility, or attractiveness. For example, people who speak a non-standard dialect are rated less competent than standard speakers (Adler et al., 2017, p. 102). A dialect is a version of the same language that is comprised of substantially different words and meanings (Adler et al., 2017, p. 97). Moreover, the use of language not only shapes attitudes towards people but also reflects people's attitudes: Language and the manner of speech reveal people's opinions and beliefs regarding power, responsibility, affiliation, attraction, and interest (Adler et al.,

Hedge
A word or phrase expressing indecisiveness about the remainder of the sentence, rather than decisiveness.

Convergence
This means to become more uniform or similar.

2017, p. 119). For instance, if speakers use **hedges** (e.g., “maybe”, “I guess”), disclaimers (e.g., “I don’t usually say this.”), or hesitations (e.g.,“uhh”, “well”), their language may be considered less powerful (Adler et al., 2017, p. 105). Subtle differences, such as the one between “It is not finished” versus “I did not finish it” indicate whether speakers take more or less responsibility. If speakers tend to show affiliation, they demonstrate **convergence** and adapt their speaking style to that of their counterpart (Adler et al., 2017, p. 105). On the contrary, speakers may engage in divergence. It is a linguistic strategy that increases the differences between the speakers’ communicative styles to create distance (Adler et al., 2017, p. 106).

Linguistic cues can also reveal our feelings. For instance, the cues indicating like or dislike can include different use of demonstrative pronouns, such as “these people need our help” (which ispositive) versus “those people need our help” (which is less positive). The latter is also an example of language being relational. It has the power to bring people closer together but at the same time can separate them through unsupportive and disruptive messages (Communication, 2016, p. 136).

Neologism
Such newly created words cannot yet be found in dictionaries.

Language is dynamic and flexible. New words are added, as in the case of **neologisms**, for example “webinar”; and old words take on new meanings, for instance, the word “influencer” which has developed a new meaning in the context of social media. New and uncommon use of words are characteristics of humor and of slang language (Communication, 2016, p. 136).

Verbal Communication Competence

Verbal competence refers to the ability to express and understand the intended notion. The conventions of a particular language determine the expression of the intended notion. They include grammar and linguistic images, such as metaphors. The senders must be familiar with these conventions to express themselves effectively. On the receiving end, familiarity with the language conventions also determines the effectiveness of the decoding process, i.e., how well the receiver can interfere the intended meaning from the verbal expression (Dai & Li, 2014, p. 20).

In order to express what we want to say as comprehensively as possible, we need to use precise terms. To select the best fitting terms, we need a wide range of vocabulary. Skilled verbal communicators have a rich vocabulary in the area of the conversation topic; for instance, if the conversation topic is football, the skilled communicator knows a lot of football jargon. If we have an extensive vocabulary in many of the possible communication topics, we can be a capable conversationalist (Greene, 2021). On top of a rich vocabulary, we need to master the rules of a language to be able to produce understandable sentences (Communication, 2016, p. 144). Reading the books covering the areas which are unfamiliar to us is a great way to expand our vocabulary. Besides, we can learn new expressions and become more familiar with the rules that govern the language use.

The next step towards an increased verbal communication competence is to practice the newly learned expressions actively. Having a great knowledge of the symbols and rules of a language not only enhances the expressive component of verbal communication competence but also increases our receiving skills, i.e., the ability to understand messages correctly.

2.4 Nonverbal Communication

According to Ray Birdwisthell (Der Spiegel, 1970), humans communicate on many levels and sometimes speak. This statement indicates the significance of nonverbal communication.

The Significance of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is significant for meaning making. Although the popular statement that nonverbal cues make up 93 percent of the meaning derived from communication roots in the misinterpretation of the research results, nonverbal cues can dominate meaning-making (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 2). We often rely heavily on nonlinguistic codes in situations with conflicting verbal and nonverbal messages, and to gain an impression regarding the emotional state of our interlocutors as well as the way they relate to us (Hargie, 2017, p. 45). Besides, we use nonverbal cues to fill in the missing meaning or to determine the credibility or trustworthiness of a person (Communication, 2016, p. 166), especially in stressful or dangerous situations. We may trust in people's actions more than in their words because we behave more instinctually and are dependent on systems of thinking and acting that had evolved before our linguistic abilities (Communication, 2016, p. 168).

To form a relationship successfully depends on the ability to communicate nonverbally. The nonverbal route dominates in conveying emotional states, which are closely linked to managing relationships. Nonverbal signals inform how we are feeling and what our feelings are towards others. Moreover, nonverbal communication regulates **immediacy** or psychological closeness. Immediacy is associated with warmth, depth of involvement, and the intensity featuring an interaction. Nonlinguistic indices involved in its expression include eye contact, interpersonal distance, smiling, and touch. These indices are modified to achieve a balance in closeness that fits the nature of the relationship. Strangers who have to stand at an intimate level of closeness in an elevator often avoid eye contact completely to compensate (Hargie, 2017, pp. 52–53).

Immediacy
This is the degree of attachment or closeness to someone.

Communication accommodation theory states more generally that interlocutors express their attitudes and relational aspirations by the extent to which they modify their communicative performance to achieve compatibility. Settling for a common speech rate, for instance, signals commonality (Hargie, 2017, p. 53). Mirroring, as the often-subconscious practice of imitating nonverbal cues of others, is also a form of accommodation and an expression of the strong human urge to fit in (Communication, 2016, p. 200).

Using nonverbal signals that accentuate differences express distance in the relationship negotiation process (Hargie, 2017, p. 53). Moreover, nonverbal signals regulate human interactions and indicate appropriate behaviors. In conversations, for instance, turn-taking signals are mostly expressed nonverbally. They indicate when we can speak, without inappropriately interrupting someone, or otherwise appear as rude (Communication, 2016, p. 201).

Nonverbal signals also serve important survival functions; for instance, consider how infants communicate their basic needs. Nonverbal communication defines our personal and social identity. The unique mixture of our accent, physical appearance, clothing, and hairstyle tells who we are individually. Our wedding ring or the jersey of our favorite sports club communicates to which group we belong (Communication, 2016, p. 173).

Characteristics of Nonverbal Communication

Phylogenetic
This is related to the evolution of mankind.

Ontogenetic
This is the development of a unique organism, e.g., a human.

Nonverbal behavior has **phylogenetic** and **ontogenetic** primacy. It evolved before verbal communication in the history of mankind, and it comes first in the life span of each human (Burgoon et al., 2016, pp. 5–6). It is processed by an older part of our brain, thus making it more instinctual and involuntary than verbal communication (Communication, 2016, p. 166). However, it is not completely involuntary. It is rather less conscious and thus more difficult to control than linguistic expressions.

Nonverbal communication tends to leak out and expose our underlying thoughts or feelings (Communication, 2016, p. 167). Moreover, it usually has interaction primacy as it often precedes verbal communication (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 6). Before we start speaking with a person, we have already formed the first impressions based on nonverbal cues.

Unlike verbal communication, nonverbal communication lacks explicit and agreed upon rules of usage. Instead, we implicitly learn the norms of nonverbal communication, which leads to greater behavioral variance (Communication, 2016, p. 168). Additionally, nonverbal communication is multidimensional as its signals can be formed by different parts of the body at the same time. This contributes to a greater ambiguity in nonverbal communication, leading to a greater potential for misinterpretation (Adler et al., 2017, p. 158). Verbal communication is our primary tool for informing about factual contents, whereas nonverbal communication is our primary tool for communicating emotions. (Communication, 2016, p. 172)

Nonverbal Communication Competence

Nonverbal communication competence consists of nonverbal expressivity and sensitivity. It includes the sending capacity to express oneself nonverbally in ways that can be understood correctly by others, and the nonverbal receiving abilities or the sensitivity to accurately decode the nonverbal expressions of others (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 25).

Both sending and receiving abilities are important as nonverbally expressive people are evaluated more favorably after the initial encounters. This may be linked to the fact that more nonverbally expressive people receive more attention and can make others engage more in the conversation and therefore feel more accepted due to increased immediacy behaviors (Communication, 2016, p. 198). Thus, nonverbally skilled speakers have a higher chance of getting their messages across and influence their interlocutors.

The skilled receiving and interpretation of nonverbals also allows for empathy, which is an important component of overall communication competence. We learn to interpret nonverbal signals through practice and by internalizing social norms, because there are no rules that can be taught explicitly (Communication, 2016, p. 206). As there is no defined set of nonverbal behavior or a "dictionary" definition of it, everyone has their own idiosyncratic set of nonverbal cues. When we interpret them, we must consider the individual context of the communicator, and compare the observed nonverbal cues to the baseline nonverbal behavior of the same individual to avoid misinterpretation (Communication, 2016, pp. 207–208).

Modalities of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal cues can be categorized according to the medium used to transmit the signals, such as vocalics, kinesics, haptics, proxemics, chronemics, appearance, and artifacts (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 19).

Vocalics

Vocalics or paralanguage are vocal nonverbal behaviors and include acoustic attributes of the voice, speech disruptions, and nonlinguistic sounds (Hall & Knapp, 2013, p. 40). The most commonly examined features of the voice include pitch, tempo (speech rate), and loudness. Other measures are lip and articulation control, rhythm, breathiness, nasality, and resonance (Hall & Knapp, 2013, p. 40). Pauses and dysfluencies are examples of speech disruptions (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 19). Nonlinguistic sounds include stutters, sighs, verbal fillers, or clearing the throat (Hall & Knapp, 2013, p. 40).

Verbalizations are more intentional regarding communication than paralinguistics, which are less specific. However, paralinguistic sounds offer important cues about the speaker's identity, personality, emotions, and intention to turn the conversation (Hall & Knapp, 2013, p. 41). Research links certain voice characteristics to personality traits (Koutsoumpis & Vries, 2021, p. 6). For instance, a loud voice and little hesitations are viewed as signs of confidence in a speaker (Adler et al., 2017, p. 170). Tempo or speech rate is often interpreted regarding the speaker's emotional state, credibility, and intelligence (Communication, 2016, p. 186). **Pitch** helps convey meaning, regulate conversational flow, and communicate the intensity of a message. For instance, English speakers recognize a sentence with a higher pitched ending as a question. There are also more complex patterns of paralanguage. Sarcasm, for example, is usually expressed by pitch and tone rather than the spoken words (Communication, 2016, p. 185).

Pitch
This is the highness or lowness of the tone of a voice.

Paralanguage can have various communicative functions. One of them is repetition, where paralinguistic cues reinforce verbal and nonverbal cues, for instance, combining the verbal expression of insecurity with an uncertain tone. When complementing, vocalics elaborate or modify verbal and nonverbal meaning, for instance, when the pitch of voice expresses the degree in which we like something. Another function is accenting, where vocalic cues emphasize particular words in a sentence to determine meaning. If we utter “mm-hmm” while we are listening to someone, we are using a vocalics instead of verbally expressing that we are actively listing and are thus substituting. Moreover, paralinguistic cues serve in regulating the flow of conversations and indicate turn taking (Communication, 2016, p. 186).

Kinesis

Kinesis is the best-known category of nonvocal, nonverbal behaviors, and it means movement. It studies the body, arm, and head movements (Communication, 2016, p. 168) or body language (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 19). Posture, as the way we position our bodies, is an important field of study. It can, for instance, communicate confidence and prevent a person from becoming victim of a crime. Our emotional state influences our posture, and this is also true vice versa. People, who enact confident postures for two minutes, feel more confident afterwards (Adler et al., 2017, p. 167). Gestures, which often include arm movements, can be categorized into adaptors, emblems, and illustrators (Communication, 2016, p. 176). Adaptors are targeted towards self, objects (e.g., pens), or others and are colloquially referred to as fidgeting. Self-adaptors or manipulators are movements in which one part of the body manipulates (e.g., massages, rubs, holds, pinches, picks) another part (Adler et al., 2017, p. 167). They typically indicate internal states of arousal or anxiety (Communication, 2016, p. 156). But not all manipulators indicate discomfort, sometimes picking an earlobe or twirling a strand of hair can indicate relaxation (Adler et al., 2017, p. 168). Emblems are gestures with a commonly agreed-on meaning within a culture, such as a thumbs-up for approval. They are not part of a formal sign system like American sign language (Communication, 2016, p. 177). Illustrators depict the verbal messages they accompany, for example, a hand gesture that indicates the size or shape of a described object (Communication, 2016, p. 178).

When it comes to the head, its positioning, facial expressions, and eye behavior are investigated (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 19). A head shake, for example, is a universal signal for “no”. Babies use it to reject feeding even before they consciously know its meaning (Communication, 2016, p. 178). The face and the eyes are the most noticed parts of the body, and it makes their impact very powerful (Adler et al., 2017, p. 168). Thus, the studies of facial expressions and eye movements (oculesics) sometimes form an independent category from kinesics (Communication, 2016, p. 186). The basic facial expressions such as happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust are recognizable by humans worldwide (Communication, 2016, p. 180). Apart from these expressions, it is difficult to interpret other face behaviors univocally due to the speed, the potential variation, and different facial parts involved in their formation (Adler et al., 2017, p. 168). The most commonly measured behaviors regarding eye include mutual gaze, glance frequency, gaze duration at partner, and proportion of looking during a certain activity (Hall & Knapp, 2013, p. 47). In mainstream Western culture, eye contact is usually a sign of involvement or interest whereas glancing away expresses the desire to avoid contact. Prolonged gaze is one of the main signals that indicate attraction (Adler et al., 2017, p. 168).

Haptics

Haptics refers to the study of touch. Since touch is essential for human development, it elicits a strong emotional reaction in the receiver (Adler et al., 2017, p. 172). It is very powerful and can be perceived as threatening or pleasant. Several studies establish a link between touch and compliance. For instance, when asked to sign a petition, the people who were touched lightly on the arm agreed to higher rates (Adler et al., 2017, p. 172).

Proxemics

Proxemics studies the use and perception of space. The communicative value of space becomes tangible when we express that we are "close" or "distant" to someone in a relationship (Communication, 2016, p. 187). What we consider as our "personal space" or an appropriate level of closeness is culturally shaped and depends on the situation and the people involved (Communication, 2016, p. 187). Choosing the optimal distance can have a powerful positive effect on a relationship (Adler et al., 2017, p. 173). On the contrary, "coming too close" can have the opposite negative effect. In contrast to personal space, a territory is a fixed physical space that an individual feels entitled to occupy (Adler et al., 2017, p. 174). The provided or demanded space expresses power and status (Adler et al., 2017, p. 174). Typically, higher positions in the corporate world are accompanied with more spacious rooms and more windows.

Chronemics

Chronemics relates to the study of the way humans use and structure time (Adler et al., 2017, p. 175). Time influences communication, for example, it is wise to keep the participants circadian rhythms in mind when scheduling a meeting. Moreover, certain seasons of the year can shape the atmosphere of a conversation (Communication, 2016, p. 191).

Culturally, the difference between a monochromic and a polychromic orientation towards time was detected. In monochronic cultures (e.g., North American, German, and Swiss) punctuality, schedules, and completing one task at a time is of high value. Polychromic cultures (e.g., South American, Mediterranean, and Arab) value flexible schedules and multiple tasks being pursued at the same time (Adler et al., 2017, p. 175). Although orientation towards time may vary personally, letting somebody wait in a monochromic culture can communicate that your time is more important than theirs, thus indicating your higher power and status (Adler et al., 2017, p. 175).

Appearance

Appearance comprises physical characteristics and adornments such as clothing or jewelry. Physical characteristics include height, weight, body shape, and other bodily features that influence attractiveness (Communication, 2016, p. 192). Although ideals of attractiveness vary and the worth of inner values is promoted, research consistently reveals that people who are rated physically attractive have advantages in many areas of life (Communication, 2016, p. 192). Clothing can influence attractiveness and is often used as a measure of impression management (Adler et al., 2017, p. 171). The first impressions particularly are based on clothes, jewelry, visible body art, hairstyles, and other visible features

(Communication, 2016, p. 192). Several research studies could trace the persuasive value of uniforms (Adler et al., 2017, p. 171). The longer the relationship lasts though, the less important clothing becomes(Adler et al., 2017, p. 171).

Artifacts

Artifacts manipulate the environment in which we interact. The placement of objects (a vase of flowers or a bowl of chocolates) and furniture can create a more formal or cozy and a more distant or intimate atmosphere (Communication, 2016, p. 193). Moreover, a more attractive workspace communicates appreciation and can enhance the workers' well-being and productivity (Adler et al., 2017, p. 174).

Although it is sometimes necessary to deconstruct nonverbal behavior into its components, it is important to realize that nonverbal codes often interact in conveying meaning. Therefore, to understand nonverbal communication, the relationship between various cues must also be taken into account (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 20). Moreover, the way nonverbal codes relate to each other is also meaningful. Nonverbal communication is congruent when the different nonverbal cues convey a coherent meaning. It is more credible and effective than inconsistent nonverbal cues (Communication, 2016, p. 200).

Relationship to Verbal Behavior

Regarding its relationship to verbal communication, nonverbal communication can reinforce, substitute for, or contradict verbally expressed meaning (Communication, 2016, p. 171). A gesture can reinforce what was said verbally; for instance, when you explain to someone to take a left turn to reach the bus stop not only by saying it but also by moving your hand to the left. You reinforce the invitation to an informal exchange of ideas by suggesting a coffeeshop rather than the office meeting room as location. When you only shrug your shoulders when your colleague asks you what time you will finish work today, you substitute the verbal phrase “I don't know” with a gesture. If your interlocutor says “I am not angry” through pressed-together teeth and a hoarse voice, the verbal message and the nonverbal cues contradict each other.

Sometimes we use contradictory nonverbal cues to be more polite. During a party conversation, for instance, you may say “Oh really? Interesting!” while your gaze wanders around the room. This is a less awkward signal to finish a conversation than to state blandly “I want to finish this conversation as I see a more interesting small-talk partner over there.” These examples show that nonverbal and linguistic information typically interacts in complex ways to convey meaning (Hall & Knapp, 2013, p. 6).

Deceit

One area in which the relationship between nonverbal and verbal behavior was researched intensively is deceit. Deception is the intentional act of altering information to influence others (Communication, 2016, p. 170). Researchers have tried for decades to identify the nonverbal cues that qualify the verbally expressed messages as not truthful.

Although there are circumstances in which deceitful messages can be detected more easily, there is no definite list of deceit indicators that can serve as lie detectors (Adler et al., 2017, p. 164); This is true even if criminal investigation shows tell us otherwise.

The nonverbal cues that may reveal deception are not usually related to the lie directly but result from nonverbal leakage. They are also linked to states of cognitive and physical arousal such as anxiety, feelings of guilt, or the increased cognitive demand to fabricate and stick to the deception (Adler et al., 2017, p. 165, Communication, 2016, p. 210).

SUMMARY

Depending on the number of involved participants, communication can be categorized as intrapersonal or interpersonal, take place in small groups or organizations, or be considered public or mass communication. Both verbal and nonverbal communication are significant in conveying meaning. Language as the means of verbal communication is governed by rules, which must be learned. It functions to express our observations, thoughts, feelings and needs; shapes our identities and the way we perceive speakers; and defines the way we relate to others. Nonverbal communication often takes place prior to verbal communication. This was true in human evolution, and is true for the development of every child, and is seen when we encounter a stranger. Nonverbal communication lacks explicit and agreed-upon rules of usage and is our primary tool for communicating emotions.

Spoken and written words are verbal modalities of communication. Nonverbal modalities of communication comprise vocals (such as paralanguage or vocalics) and nonvocal behaviors. Regarding nonvocal behaviors, kinesics studies movements, haptics refers to touch, proxemics studies the concept of space, chronemics relates to the use of time, appearance refers to physical characteristics and adornments, and artifacts refers to the manipulation of the environment. In a communication situation, the different modalities of communication interact in conveying meaning and influence each other.

UNIT 3

PERCEPTION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

- define perception.
- depict the perception process.
- recount eight tendencies that can cause errors in the perception of others.
- elaborate on three factors that influence our perception of others.
- describe the influences on our self-concept.
- explain how our self-perception shapes our behavior.

3. PERCEPTION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Introduction

Perception is a fundamental part of the communication process. What we perceive in each situation determines the way we communicate with the people involved. As we will learn in this chapter, perception is not a simple reflection of the situation. Rather, our perception, or the picture we have of the external world, may differ depending on several factors. These factors shape the perspective we have on a situation and originate, in the perception process itself, the way we perceive others and picture ourselves.

3.1 Perception Process

Perception
The meaning-making process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting sensory information.

Information about the external world is perceived by the five human senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell (Communication, 2016, p. 72). The perceived visual, auditory, gustatory, cutaneous, and olfactory stimuli are then translated into organized experiences. **Perception** is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting sensory information to make sense of our experiences (Communication, 2016, p. 53). In perceiving, all humans have to deal with a fundamental constraint: Although the human brain is still much more capable than the most powerful computers, its capacity is limited, and it is not able to process the vast number of stimuli available in each moment. To deal with this limitation, the perception process starts off with selecting the data that will be processed further.

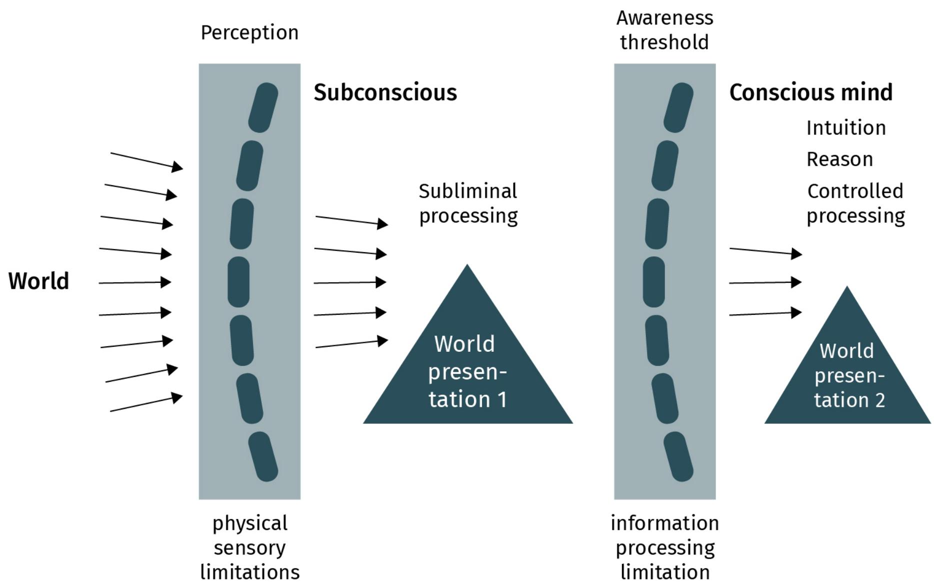
Selecting

Attention
It is our selective perception filter.

Intuition
It is an immediate insight or perception, without conscious reasoning or reflection.

Our environment provides too much information for the human brain to manage. Thus, our **attention** only filters a limited amount of information into the conscious mind. Some of the remainder may be stored at a subconscious level, whereas the rest is passed by our selective perception filter unconsciously. Research into subliminal perceptions, i.e., the perception of stimuli below the awareness threshold, shows that these perceptions can have priming effects. For instance, a piece of information shown on a screen for a very short time that cannot be read consciously can influence response, judgement, and attitude (Hargie, 2017, p. 179). Moreover, subconscious information guides our **intuition**.

Figure 9: Selective Perception Filter



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on evsc (2012).

During the selecting process, our attention focuses on certain incoming sensory information and lets other stimuli pass unnoticed (Communication, 2016, p. 53). How likely it is for a stimulus to be noticed depends on its salience. Salience is the quality of prominence, the likelihood that something attracts our attention in a particular context (Communication, 2016, p. 54).

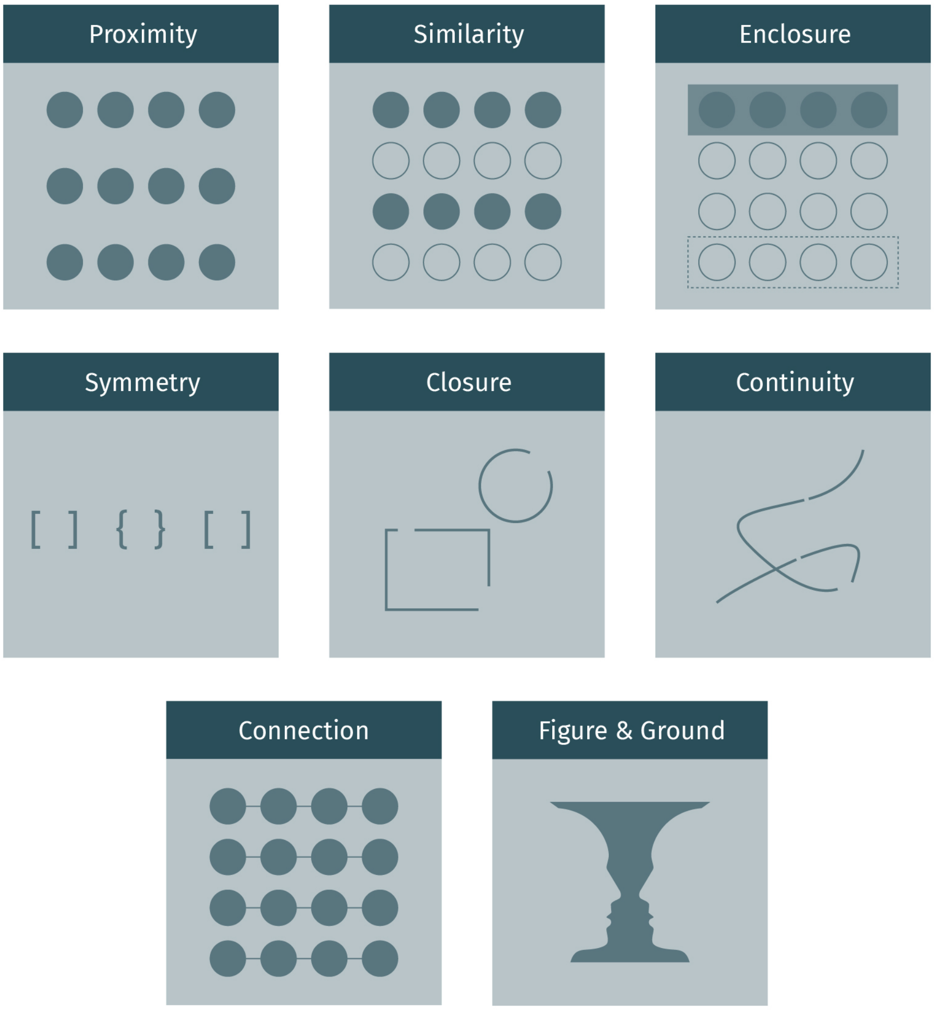
The degree of salience depends firstly on the stimulus itself and how stimulating or intense it is. Things that are louder, bigger, or brighter than our surroundings usually draw our attention. We also tend to focus on changes (Adler et al., 2017, p. 43), that is why message notifications magically draw our attention. Secondly, it depends on internal factors. We usually pay attention to the things that meet our needs or interests. When we are hungry, we notice the food adverts and smells everywhere, we only focus on the parts of a conversation that we find interesting. Lastly, our expectations direct what we find salient (Communication, 2016, p. 54). When we expect a friend to arrive at our house, for instance, we concentrate on sounds in front of our door that indicate their arrival. If we expect our supervisor to criticize us, we do not heed their praise. The unexpected things that surprise us can also become salient, like a bride on a subway train or our gentle friend who suddenly raises their voice.

Due to the changing nature of internal factors, the salience of a stimulus can change. Stimuli, such as a ticking clock, the hum of the heater, or the pressure of our body on the chair, are usually filtered into the subconscious mind during interesting social encounters. If the encounter is rather boring, such as a dull lecture, these stimuli can become salient and be given more attention than the lecturer (Hargie, 2017, p. 180).

Organizing

The information that has become salient and thus passed our perceptual filters is then organized into a meaningful whole. Organization follows the principles identified by the German School of Gestalt Psychology; for instance, this includes the principles of figure-ground, similarity, proximity, and closure (Bruce et al., 2003, pp. 119–129).

Figure 10: Gestalt Principles



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Bruce et al. (2003, pp. 119–129).

We organize objects into figure and ground and focus on the first. For example, while reading, we concentrate on the black letters and their shapes and ignore the white space around them; or we focus on the woman if she stands in a group of men. We group stimuli to arrange them into meaningful patterns. For instance, we assume that similar things form a category and are alike; or all animals with wings fly; or all Asians prefer tea to coffee. An example for proximity would be our assumption that the closest picture to a writ- ???

ten paragraph on a webpage covers the same issue; or when we see two strangers for the first time standing next to each other, we assume that they are related. Closure means that we add information to form a concise whole. For instance, our vision closes lines to form complete shapes; or if an acquaintance tells us that they have bought a house in the countryside, we might mentally add a garden, although they never mentioned it (Communication, 2016, p. 57, 58).

Interpretation

Selection and organization of stimuli usually happens quickly and unconsciously, but interpretation can be made consciously (Communication, 2016, p. 59). We use cognitive schemata for interpretation. These mental structures allow us to assign meaning to the information we have selected and organized. Regarding people, we typically use four types of schemata to classify them:

1. **Physical constructs** refer to appearance, such as attractive, athletic, or middle-aged.
2. **Role constructs** refer to social and occupational positions, such as student, wife, or fireworker.
3. **Interaction constructs** refer to social behaviors, such as friendly, accommodating, or impolite.
4. **Psychological constructs** refer to internal states of mind and dispositions, such as confident, extravert, or depressive (Adler et al., 2017, p. 43).

Schemata possess properties, and we normally assume that the things we have classified according to a schema have the same characteristics. This process is called "generalization" broadly and "stereotyping" when it refers to members of social groups. For instance, we presume that fireworkers are athletic and courageous; or our extravert classmate is great at giving presentations. These assumptions guide our behavior; for example, we might step back and let our classmate delivers the presentation. Scripts are special schemata that guide our interactions as they contain information about appropriate behavior in certain types of social situations, such as visiting a restaurant, attending a funeral, or asking a question in class (Communication, 2016, p. 60). As long as these generalizations are accurate, they are helpful ways of simplifying our complex world, and thus making navigating it more manageable. However, we must be aware that generalization can fail us (Adler et al., 2017, p. 44). For example, your extravert friend may suffer from stage anxiety and fail the group presentation; or your German script of choosing your table and seating yourself in a restaurant may cause irritation in a Chinese context where the waiter expects to place you. Such critical incidents can make us revise and adapt our schemata to make them compatible, for example, with the Chinese context (Communication, 2016, p. 60). As they are based on the previous experiences and accumulated knowledge of the individuals, the schemata guiding our perception are highly personal. For instance, if your ethnic background has influenced your life experience decisively, you will tend to use ethnical schemata to explain other people's behavior (Communication, 2016, p. 60; Adler et al., 2017, p. 44).

3.2 Perceiving Others

Perception is relevant in all human interactions; yet it is a profoundly precarious activity. Perception is an active and highly selective process, especially in regard to perceiving other humans. Rather than being merely passive recipients, we actively form our perceptions. As we have already learned about perceptual selection, we only attend to a fraction of the available stimuli and filter out the less salient, less interesting, or less relevant cues. As such, perception is subjective and it is rarely correct, factual, or objective. Therefore, the way we are perceived depends more on the perceiver than us, the cues available to the perceiver, and the unique way they interpret them (Hargie, 2017, p. 39).

Considering the perception process in general, we have already learned that the schemata or categories we use influence the way we interpret a situation and the people involved. In the next section, we will look deeper into the way we perceive others as well as the way perceptual tendencies and key factors influence our perception while containing potential perceptual errors.

Perceptual Tendencies

Common human tendencies distort our perception and can lead to the following perceptual errors and biases:

Fundamental attribution error

When interpreting the people around us, our mind tries constantly to explain their behaviors: Why didn't my colleague greet me? Why didn't my teammate meet the deadline? We try to find reasons and attribute the causes of such behaviors to internal or external factors.

Internal attributions use personal aspects for explanation, such as personality traits. External attributions link the cause of behaviors to situational factors (Communication, 2016, p. 65). Depending on your attribution, your behavior towards your colleague may vary. If you attribute not meeting the deadline to external factors such as an unmanageable workload, you might sympathize with your teammate. However, if you attribute it internally and explain it with laziness, your communication with them will be much less understanding.

Our tendency to use internal rather than external attributions to explain the others' behaviors leads to one of the most common perceptual errors called the fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967). For example, employees tend to attribute the corporate failure to incapable managers (internal attribution) rather than to a difficult business environment (external attribution); (Communication, 2016, p. 66).

Self-serving bias

When explaining our own behavior, another perceptual error becomes relevant. Due to self-serving bias (Miller & Ross, 1975), we tend to attribute our failures to external factors that are beyond our control. However, we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors. The consequences of the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias taken together are that we are likely to judge ourselves more favorably than others (Communication, 2016, p. 66).

Snap judgements

Anticipating risks is important for our safety and survival. Our brain wants to predict what is next to be prepared and to secure our social and physical well-being. The capacity to judge others rapidly was crucial for our distant ancestors who had to decide quickly whether someone they met for the first time could cause them serious harm (Hargie, 2017, p. 274). Thus, humans evolved to form a first impression based on a very quick assessment of a person. In the social encounters of today, we still select and evaluate the cues that help us to predict the next step of the interaction (Hargie, 2017, p. 274). The more accurate the prediction, the more appropriately we can respond to a person. Therefore, forming an accurate first impression is also a key component of communication competence. The “zero-acquaintance” research has shown that many of our snap judgements regarding others are surprisingly accurate; however, they can also be inaccurate because they are based on minimal evidence.

Primacy effect

Once formed correctly or incorrectly, first impressions are relatively stable due to the primacy effect. This perceptual tendency makes us value the information we receive first about a person more highly than the later received information. Consequently, the saying “you never get a second chance to make a good first impression” contains considerable wisdom (Communication, 2016, p. 67; Hargie, 2017, pp. 269, 275). Due to the primacy effect, names are important; and research shows, for example, that people with common names are favored when hiring (Hargie, 2017, p. 274).

Selective distortion–halo and horn effect

If the first impression is positive, the halo effect will occur as initial positive perceptions which lead to forming a positive view of later interactions (Communication, 2016, p. 70; Hargie, 2017, p. 274). The horn effect occurs when negative first impressions overshadow laterinteractions and make us interpret them through a negative lens. Both effects are expressions of selective distortion, the tendency to adapt later-received information to our earlier impressions so that they become compatible with the already-established cognitive frame (Communication, 2016, p. 70; Hargie, 2017, p. 274).

Recency effect

Another erroneous perceptual tendency is the recency effect. It leads us to value the most recent or the last impression in a sequence more highly than earlier impressions of a person’s behavior. If a job candidate makes an overall good impression in the interview but says goodbye in a weird way, this negative final impression can tarnish the overall impression (Communication, 2016, p. 68). Regarding the primacy and recency effect, Hargie (2017, p. 269) suggests paying reasonable attention to the way we both initiate and end an encounter.

Assumed similarity

Assumed similarity describes the tendency to perceive others as being similar to us. When we do not have enough information about others, we assume that they possess similar personality traits, attitudes, motives, and likes and dislikes as us. (Adler et al., 2017, p. 51; Communication, 2016, p. 75). For instance, we assume that others enjoy the same jokes as we do, although humor is highly individual.

Dominance of salience

The principle of salience applied to perceiving others means that we tend to perceive the most obvious things about other people. This dominance can lead us to neglecting the other relevant cues. The most noticeable behavior can also become salient; for instance, if a child lashes out against another child, it is often blamed, although the less noticeable teasing of the other child is equally responsible for the fight (Adler et al., 2017, p. 51). Moreover, physical features tend to become salient and can dominate our perception as we will see in the next paragraph.

Key Factors in the Perception of Others

Besides perceptual tendencies, physical, cultural, and personal factors shape the way we perceive others.

Physical factors

The style of dressing and grooming are important, especially in professional contexts. We have general schemata of how to dress appropriately for situations, ranging from formal to business casual, casual, and private (Communication, 2016, p. 68). Our perception uses nonverbal communication cues, such as clothing or hairstyle, as indicators to inform us that someone belongs to a distinct social group; and consequently, we expect to see certain behaviors associated with this schema. That is why scams that involve fraudsters who dress up like the social groups considered as authoritative and trustworthy (such as the police or medical workers) are effective (Communication, 2016, p. 68).

Milgram's (1963) experiment offers insight into the powerful influences of physical prompts. In this experiment, the participants were asked to deliver electric shocks (they were fake) every time the next-door person answered a memory question incorrectly. Surprisingly, they followed the instructions without scrutinizing them just because they were delivered by a man wearing a white lab coat. The goal of the experiment was to gain insight into whether people obey the authority figures or act independently (Communication, 2016, p. 68).

Physical body features, such as the degree to which we perceive a person as attractive, also shape the way we interact with the others (Communication, 2016, p. 69). Moreover, our impression of a person is formed by features of the physical environment such as the design and arrangement of someone's office or apartment (Communication, 2016, p. 70).

Cultural factors

We perceive others through our cultural lens. We belong to distinct cultures due to our ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, education, and other factors. As we are socialized into and by these cultural groups, we internalize the beliefs, attitudes, and values shared by our group members (Communication, 2016, p. 71). Socialization happens through firsthand experiences and exposure to media. Media influences our perception with the labels it uses to categorize people and their behavior. Cultural **stereotypes** related to age, gender, and ethnicity are often reinforced, and the members of historically marginalized groups rarely find positive representations of their identities in media (Communication, 2016, p. 91).

Stereotype
It is a set of cognitive generalizations about the characteristics associated with members of a social group.

Culture influences the schemata we use to classify people and the behavior we expect of them. Think, for example, of a hipster, a fashionista or an intellectual. Certain categories only exist in distinct cultures, such as the “Autonome Szene” in Germany or the “Lying Flat Movement” in China. Members of the first group fight against the existing governmental structures and capitalism, and some of them consider violence as a legitimate measure for their fight. Members of the latter promote a lifestyle of doing the bare minimum to survive. They disengage from the competitive society of the present China and do not strive for a prestigious job or owning a car or a house. The schemata within a cultural identity group are similar, but may vary decisively between groups (Communication, 2016, p. 71). This can explain the reason the same incident can be interpreted very differently by members of distinct cultural groups. For instance, upon seeing a sun-tanned young woman, a member of a western culture may assume that she is wealthy because she has the time and the money to go on vacation and sunbath. However, a member of an Asian culture may consider her as poor because she seems to work outside in a blue-collar job and cannot protect her skin enough from being tanned.

Considering someone either as an ingroup (belonging to a social group relevant to our cultural identity) or outgroup (not belonging to our social group) member is according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) highly influential on our perception. We consider ingroup members as being like ourselves and thus more trustworthy, friendly, and honest than outgroup members. On the contrary, we perceive outgroup members as “not like ourselves”, and we tend to use internal attributions to explain their negative behavior (Communication, 2016, p. 73). Language use reinforces our biased attributions: Socially desirable ingroup behaviors and undesirable outgroup behaviors are described using an abstract language (e.g., violence), implying stable internal reasons. In contrast, socially undesirable ingroup behaviors and desirable outgroup behaviors are described in a more concrete language (e.g., hitting), implying situational reasons and thus external attributions. In this way, verbal communication transmits and maintains the positive ingroup and negative outgroup stereotypes (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 36). This so-called intergroup bias can extend beyond ingroup favoritism and produce prejudices and outgroup discrimination (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 37).

Humans also actively influence the degree of perceived similarity to others. The communication accommodation theory (Gallois et al., 2005) explains the three strategies in use: When interactive partners employ the strategy of convergence, they adapt their communicative behaviors to become more similar to each other in terms of linguistic (e.g., language), paraverbal (e.g., pitch), and nonverbal (e.g., smiling) features (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 37). Regarding nonverbal communication, mirroring describes the often-subconscious practice of matching nonverbal cues to those of others to create similarity (Communication, 2016, p. 200). Humans increase similarity as it makes them more attractive to their interlocutors and more prone to receiving approval. When applying divergence strategy, humans accentuate verbal and nonverbal differences to emphasize dissimilarity. To distinguish themselves from relevant outgroups can create a more positive social identity (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 40), which is important for our self-concept as we will learn later in this chapter. The third strategy of maintenance sustains the original way of communicating and the perceived similarity (Communication, 2016, p. 155; Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 37).

Personal factors

Besides social cultural factors, personal factors such as our experiences influence how we perceive others. For instance, if someone has had bad experiences with a previous math teacher, they might expect trouble with the new math teacher. Furthermore, personal factors form our knowledge of and familiarity with our interlocutor. For instance, if we know that our friend is going through a stressful phase in their life, we might interpret their behavior during that period more benevolently than other times. Personal factors also include relational factors, such as our current satisfaction with our relationship. For example, if we are generally happy with the relationship, we might forgive our partner more easily when they hurt our feelings (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 44–45).

Our personalities also influence the way we perceive ourselves and others. Personality is a person's general way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, which is relatively stable throughout their lifespan and in different situations. The most agreed-on personality traits (even across cultures) are McCrea's (2001) "Big Five" of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (Communication, 2016, p. 76). Upon meeting a person, however, we refer to our experiences rather than academic personality theories.

Such implicit personality theories are implied rather than being explicitly observed or known. In other words, based on the observed behaviors that we use as indicators for certain "personality traits", we generalize the overall personality of our interaction partner. This perceptual shortcut reduces uncertainty as we feel we know the person. In contrast, the potential disadvantage lies in the incorrect but enduring character of this perception (Communication, 2016, p. 76). Whether or not the judgments are accurate, they will influence our response to our partner. Our response can in turn influence their behavior, creating a **self-fulfilling prophecy** (Adler et al., 2017, p. 51). For example, if we assume that someone is hostile to us, our communication will leak this suspicion; and it then leads to our partner's reluctant response which can confirm our assumption of hostility.

Self-fulfilling prophecy
According to this phenomenon, the expectation of a behavior brings about the predicted or expected behavior.

Checking Perception of Others

The understanding that our perceptions of others might be inaccurate can lead us to scrutinize our perceptions; this eventually results in more accurate perceptions. Sometimes it is also appropriate to actively check your perceptions. In doing so, according to Adler et al. (2017, p. 54), you can engage in the following three steps:

1. Describing the behavior you have noticed
2. Offering at least two possible interpretations of the noticed behavior
3. Requesting clarification to make sure how to interpret the behavior

For example, when you left the office yesterday without saying goodbye to me (description), I was not sure whether you hold a grudge against me (the first interpretation) or you were in a hurry (the second interpretation). How did you feel? (requesting clarification).

In this way, we can avoid perceptual inaccuracy, false interpretations, and hence miscommunication. Research studies have shown that the individuals who perceive more accurately have higher-quality relationships, adjust better psychologically, and achieve more favorable workplace outcomes. In addition, competent communicators can make more accurate perceptions of self and the way they are perceived by others (Hargie, 2017, p. 39). We will discuss this issue more in the following section.

3.3 Perceiving and Presenting Self

The way we view and present ourselves shapes our communication and is shaped by communication with others, as we will learn in the following section when we explore different concepts related to our self and mechanisms of self-presentation.

Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy

Our **self-concept** is based on the way other people communicate with and about us and the way we process that communication intrapersonally (Communication, 2016, p. 7). It can be understood as a mental mirror reflecting the picture we have of ourselves and in which the others' reactions to us are reflected. Self-concept comprises relatively stable perceptions of ourselves regarding our physical appearance, our emotional states, talents, intellects, values, and roles (Adler et al., 2017, p. 36). A child, for instance, may overhear the caretakers labeling them as "smart." The child then may internalize smartness as a part of their self-concept because the caretakers have interpreted their behavior as smart.

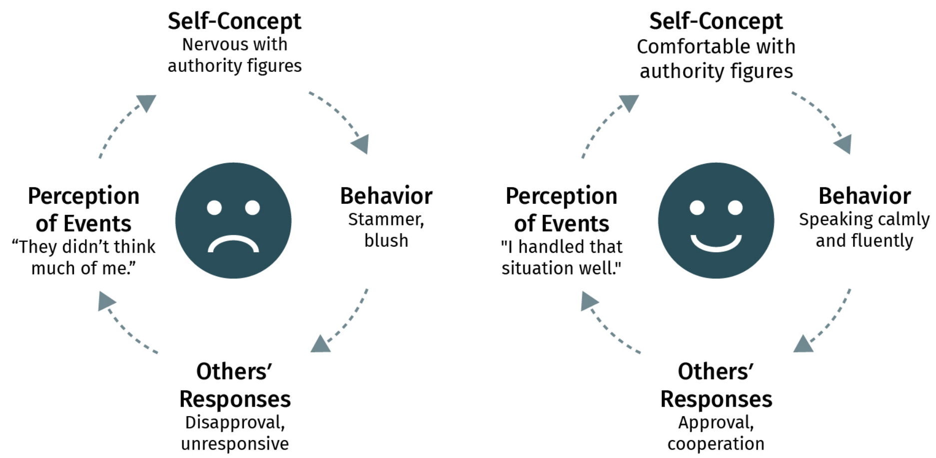
Self-concept
It is one's perception of oneself and includes psychological and physical characteristics.

In relation to their positive self-concept, the child may also develop a higher **self-efficacy**. This psychological construct was introduced by Bandura (1997). It refers to the way people judge their ability to perform a task within a specific context (Communication, 2016, p. 83). In the example case, the child may approach difficult math problems more confidently, i.e., with higher self-efficacy beliefs, due to their self-concept of being smart and thus smart enough to find a solution. Solving the problems will reaffirm their self-concept of being smart and strengthen their self-efficacy, creating a virtuous cycle.

Self-efficacy
It is the subjective perception of one's capability to perform in a given setting and to reach desired goals.

The opposite – a vicious cycle regarding one's self-concept – can be established by negative labels such as "troublemaker" or "stupid." These cycles are reinforced by perceptual distortion and attribution, two tendencies we have learned about previously: If a girl who considers herself smart encounters an unsolvable problem, she is likely to attribute externally and labels the problem as too difficult to make the experience fit within her established frame of being smart. However, a child who is labelled as "stupid" may attribute the failure internally, so it fits their belief of being stupid. Here we can see how our self-concept can be self-fulfilling and lead to reinforcing cycles of thinking and acting (Communication, 2016, p. 81).

Figure 11: The Relationship Between Self-Concept and Behavior



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Adler et al. (2017, p. 41)

Self-esteem
It is the degree to which one perceives the qualities of one's self-concept as positive.

Our feeling about the qualities of our self-concept accounts also for our **self-esteem** (Adler et al., 2017, p. 37; Communication, 2016, p. 81). This evaluation of self-worth influences the way we communicate with others and are viewed by others (Adler et al., 2017, p. 37). People with high self-esteem tend to be more confident, approach conflicts more collaboratively, and are more valued by their peers, which reinforces their sense of belonging and worthiness (Adler et al., 2017, p. 37). Low self-esteem, on the other hand, may lead to avoidance of social situations and in turn makes it harder to be acknowledged and appreciated by others and leaves one even less confident (Adler et al., 2017, p. 37). However, an inflated sense of self-worth can also be a source of irritation in social interactions (Adler et al., 2017, p. 37). Regarding the influences on self-worth, humans vary in the degree to which they base their self-worth on external factors like praise or criticism (Hargie, 2017, p. 99). Moreover, not every praise or criticism has the same impact. The more important the ability is for us and our self-concept, the higher the impact on our self-esteem usually is(Communication, 2016, p. 82).

Presenting self

Humans are not merely passive recipients of the others' messages regarding their self-concept. Rather, they tend to present themselves in such a way to trigger a certain evaluative response (Hargie, 2017, p. 99). Self-presentation aims at influencing the others' perceptions of oneself by strategically concealing or revealing personal information (Communication, 2016, p. 92). One potential aim of self-presentation or impression management is self-enhancement. Individuals make reasonable effort to appear appealing to others (Hargie, 2017, p. 99). People may use strategies, such as entitlements, and associate themselves with successful events or people to bask in the reflected glory of those events or people; Or they may use enhancements as attempts to exaggerate the importance of one's achievements (Hargie, 2017, p. 241). Although some people use self-presentation to intentionally deceive others, the majority aims at making a positive impression while remaining authentic (Communication, 2016, p. 84). Skilled self-presenters provide others with more positive and accurate information about themselves and are usually perceived as more engaging and confident (Communication, 2016, p. 84). Since mediated communication reveals less information about the sender of a message than face-to-face communication, it allows for more strategic impression management. Its asynchronous nature offers the option to phrase a response strategically and carefully, and to create enhanced identities like the ones often found on online dating websites (Adler et al., 2017, p. 61).

Another potential aim is self-verification, which seeks the confirmation of one's self-concept rather than a positive evaluation. Whether self-enhancement or self-verification is intended, depends on cultural, situational, and personal factors: Individuals who are part of individualistic Western cultures that value competition, tend to self-enhance more than the members of collective Asian cultures that value modesty (Communication, 2016, p. 88). Regarding personal factors, research findings suggest that individuals with low self-esteem tend to strive for self-verification. They tend to disapprove the praise and approval which is inconsistent with their poor self-concept (Hargie, 2017, p. 99). Our self-concept is also rooted in the comparison with others. Social comparison theory states that we categorize and evaluate ourselves by comparing us to others (Festinger, 1954).We gain an impression of ourselves through these associations and make judgements about the quality of our abilities or the appropriateness of our opinions by watching and listening to others (Hargie, 2017, p. 441). For example, we compare our performance at work to that of our colleagues to evaluate if we are a high, low, or average performer. If we evaluate ourselves as superior to others, our self-esteem is heightened; and it is diminished if we feel inferior (Hargie, 2017, p. 441). Moreover, when we compare ourselves to others, we may feel similar to or different from them. Especially in adolescent and teen years, we feel pressured to be like or distinct from reference groups as our self-concept is developing (Communication, 2016, p. 81).

It is noteworthy to mention that media characters usually represent the features of idealized attractiveness and comparing ourselves with their unrealistic standard of beauty and bodyweight makes us feel inferior (Communication, 2016, p. 91). The same is true about social media, where people usually post only the pictures of their best moments. In comparison to these highlights, our life can seem dull and mundane. Advertising uses the human tendency of social comparison for its purpose. It communicates to us that we are inferior because we lack a certain product or service; but if we purchase it, we can overcome our inferiority (Communication, 2016, p. 91).

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) explains another important influence on our self-esteem that is based on comparison. According to this theory, our self-concept comprises three different selves: The actual self consists of the attributes we believe we actually possess; the ideal self consists of the attributes we would like to possess; and the ought self consists of the attributes we believe we should possess. Discrepancies between the actual and the ideal selves can motivate us to engage in self-improvement but can also cause dissatisfaction and frustration. Discrepancies between the actual and the normative ought-self often causes stress and feelings of guilt or shame; for example, if we believe that we should be a "perfect parent", but cannot fulfill this superior moral standard (Communication, 2016, p. 86, 87).

Besides characteristics describing our personal identity, such as abilities, personality traits, or attitudes, our self-concept is also contingent on our social identity (Communication, 2016, p. 79; Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 31). This part of our identity refers to the social groups we associate with (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 59). Self-categorization theory (Turner et al. 1987) explains the time and the reason either our personal or social identity becomes more salient (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 31). For example, an only woman in a group of men tends to be more aware of her female identity. This is also true about our national identity, which becomes more salient as soon as you leave your home country. A salient social identity has a depersonalizing effect on self-perception: We tend to adapt to prototypical behavior, i.e., behavior we associate with a typical group member (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 35). In the previous section, we learned about the intergroup bias that makes us perceive ingroup members more positively than outgroup members. Intergroup bias serves a positive self-concept: as we perceive "our" groups more positively, we can also perceive ourselves as members of these groups more positively and thus enhance our self-esteem (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 36).

In contrast to depersonalizing intergroup encounters, personal identities are salient in intimate interpersonal encounters, where interlocutors perceive each other as unique individuals (Adler et al., 2017, p. 11). This indicates that we have different identities due to the multiple roles we obtain. In one day, we can have the role of a diligent student, a friendly neighbor, a faithful friend, or an unsatisfied customer. Each role differs in the speaking style, the socially accepted behaviors associated with it, and other expected behaviors. Managing our identity and thus presenting our self in a way that fits the role context indicates communication competence (Adler et al., 2017, p. 56). This ability is also known as "frame switching" and involves adopting different perspectives depending on the cultures and situations we are in (Adler et al., 2017, p. 57). Although it can be misused, managing your identities does not make you dishonest. In fact, we cannot communicate competently without making decisions about which face or part of our identity to present in each situation to communicate appropriately (Adler et al., 2017, p. 61).

3.4 Communicative Styles

The general tendency to the way we see and present ourselves and perceive others is reflected in our communicative style. A communicative style is a pattern of interacting which is comparatively stable across situations (Hargie, 2018, pp. 52, 53). It is characterized by verbal (e.g., words), paraverbal (e.g., voice characteristics), and nonverbal (e.g., gestures) cues and linked to an individual's personality (Koutsoumpis & de Vries, 2021, p. 2).

The number of styles and their exact descriptions vary across the literature, but the commonly included features are assertiveness, responsiveness, and expressiveness. Norton (1983), for instance, has described nine distinctive styles, each on a continuum between two poles (as shown in the table below). Accordingly, a communicator whose style is highly dominant tends to control interaction, give orders, and be in the center of attention. They may also speak loudly and make interruptions, prolonged eye contact, and few pauses. In contrast, a rather submissive communicator whose dominance is low will be rather quiet, take orders, and shy away from the spotlight (Hargie, 2018, p. 53). Communication styles are mostly destined by biology, as studies of identical and fraternal twins suggest. However, we can change our communication style through intentional training (Adler et al., 2017, p. 21).

Table 2: Communicative Styles

1	**Dominant**	**Submissive**
	Control interaction, give orders, center of attention, loud voice, interruptions, prolonged eye contact, fewer pauses	Quiet, to take orders, shy away from the spotlight
2	**Dramatic**	**Reserved**
	Exaggerate their messages with verbal and nonverbal cues, use storytelling	Quieter, more modest, and understating
3	**Contentious**	**Affiliative**
	Argumentative, provocative or contrary	Agreeable, peace-loving, affiliative
4	**Animated**	**Inexpressive**
	Rich use of gestures, facial expressions, and body movement to gain attention and convey enthusiasm	Dull, slow-moving, inexpressive
5	**Relaxed**	**Frenetic**
	Self-controlled, calm, unflustered	Tense, quickly lose self-control, get excited easily, fidget
6	**Attentive**	**Inattentive**
	Listen carefully, display overt signs of listening (e.g. eye contact, posture)	Listen poorly, do not express interest
7	**Impression-leaving**	**Insignificant**
	Flamboyant, memorable style of communicating, wear loud clothes, unusual hairstyles, controversial interactive manner	Unremarkable, non-controversial, conservatively dressed
8	**Open**	**Closed**
	Approachable, unreserved, candid, and conversational, share personal things	Guarded, secretive, loath to express opinions
9	**Friendly**	**Hostile**
	Frequent smiles, happy, very rewarding, non-competitive	Overtly aggressive, competitive, and unrewarding

Source: Hargie, (2018, p. 53)

SUMMARY

Perception is a fundamental yet critical part of communication. Perceptual tendencies inform our behavior, and perceptual errors can lead to misunderstandings and irritation. They can relate to the perception process, the perception of others, or the perception of self. First, perceptual errors can root in the perception process itself: Relevant information may fail to become salient and not pass our attention. Besides defective selection, we can also err in the organization and interpretation of information. Second, when perceiving others, numerous tendencies in human perception can distort our impressions. As humans have evolved to form rapid first impressions using generalizations, we rely on snap judgements. They are usually based on the salient but not the most relevant information, or on the assumed similarity but not the real one. Moreover, the effects of primacy and recency as well as halo and horn describe the way we assimilate information to fit into an established frame. Our perception also strives for a positive self-image, which explains the reason the fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias are at work. Besides general tendencies, our perception of others is influenced by their physical appearance and the environment. Additionally, cultural factors, especially the cognitive schemata we have about social groups and whether we regard someone as an ingroup or outgroup member, affect our perception. Our impressions of others are also influenced by personal factors, such as our experiences and personality theories. As we become aware that our perceptions of others can be inaccurate, it can be appropriate to actively clarify our perceptions. Third, our self-concept and the way we evaluate our self-worth and our self-efficacy shapes communication and is shaped by it. In general, humans strive to present a positive image to receive the approval that further enhances the self. Other influences on our self-concept are comparisons to others and ourselves. Besides individual qualities, our self-image is based on our social identities. Depending on the situation, our individual or our social identity can become salient and determine our communicative behavior. Our communicative style reflects the general way we are perceived by others when it comes to communication.

UNIT 4

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

- elaborate on listening as a core skill of communication competence.
- explain the importance of perspective-taking.
- depict questions as powerful communication tools.
- describe the use and benefits of I-language.
- formulate complete and non-violent messages.
- define meta-communication.
- portray the key presuppositions of Neuro-Linguistic Programming and some of its techniques.

4. COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

Introduction

Competent communication requires the application of several communication skills and techniques. In this unit, we look at them in the context of interpersonal communication, but they are also useful in other types of communication. The term “technique” may sound rather mechanical; however, since communication is about human interaction, we can never employ a technique or skill mind- or heartlessly. If we do so, we will fail to connect with our interlocutors and the communication will not reach its goal. With listening, perspective-taking, and questioning, we are looking at the communication skills that may incorporate different techniques. In this unit, we will first look into listening and explore its challenges and ways to overcome them. Second, we will learn about the importance of perspective-taking and its link to empathy. Third, we will explore questioning and its power in managing the content and structure of a conversation. After that, we will learn about the use of I-language, complete messages, and meta-communication. Lastly, we will explore Neuro-Linguistic Programming and some of its techniques.

4.1 Listening

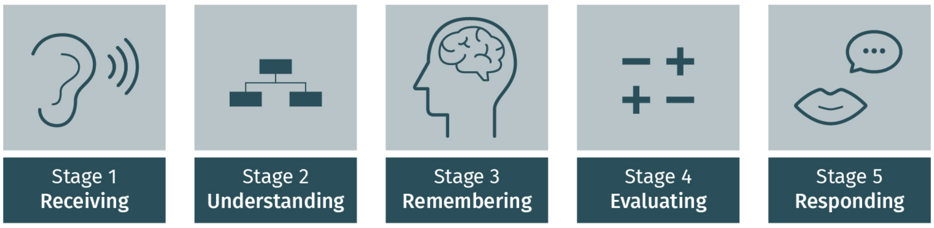
Listening is a core skill of communication competence (Communication, 2016, p. 246; Hargie, 2017, p. 174). More component listeners are more successful academically, are more likely to be hired and promoted, and make better leaders (Adler et al., 2017, p. 125; Communication, 2016, p. 234; Hargie, 2017, p. 173). Moreover, listening is a pre-requisite skill for all other communicative skills. If you are unable to listen competently, you will struggle to develop other components of communication competence (Hargie, 2017, p. 175). Knowledge of the following factors is crucial in becoming a competent listener: the various stages of the listening process, the four ears of the listener, common barriers to listening, problematic listening habits, and active listening skills.

The Process of Listening

When exploring the mental process of listening, we realize that hearing only happens in the first stage of the process when we receive information. The physical and automatic activity of hearing is defined as the “process in which sound waves strike the eardrum and cause vibrations that are transmitted to the brain” (Adler et al., 2017, p. 126). If the sound becomes salient and passes the selective perception filter of our attention, we will attend to the auditive signal and may also perceive the related visual signals. For example, if we hear someone speaking, we may turn our head to pay attention to their facial expressions as well. In the second stage of listening, we organize and interpret the received auditive and visual information to gain understanding. Hence, we relate, for example, the verbal and nonverbal cues and use our cognitive schemata to assign meaning and make sense of the message. The higher the listening fidelity, the higher the congruency between the listener’s understanding and the intended meaning of the sender (Adler et al., 2017, p. 126).

In the third stage of remembering, the interpreted information may pass the different storage units of our memory. Our sensory storage can store large amounts of information, but only for a very limited amount of time. Visual information, for instance, can only be stored for about a tenth of a second, whereas auditory information can be kept for up to four seconds. Interpreted stimuli make their way to our short-term memory where they can be retained for 20 seconds to one minute. They either expire or are connected to the existing schemata and stored in our long-term memory. Our working memory is a temporarily accessible storage unit that is able to store, process, and use information all at the same time (Communication, 2016, p. 231; Hargie, 2017, pp. 180–181). On average, human memory is highly fallible: We forget 50 percent of the message right after reception, 65 percent of it after eight hours, and 80 percent of it after 24 hours (Hargie, 2017, p. 189). In the fourth stage we evaluate the information and make judgement about whether it is credible, complete, and valuable (Communication, 2016, p. 232). In the last stage of responding, we give observable feedback to the speaker. The feedback does not necessarily have to be a verbal response. It can also be back-channel cues, i.e., verbal and nonverbal behavior such as eye contact, head nods, or "mm-hmm" sounds to express our interest. Beyond this, we might use paraphrasing and rephrase the received message in our own words or ask questions to clarify our understanding (Communication, 2016, p. 233). While listening is portrayed as a linear process here, its sub-processes are inter-related (Hargie, 2017, p. 177).

Figure 12: The Listening Process



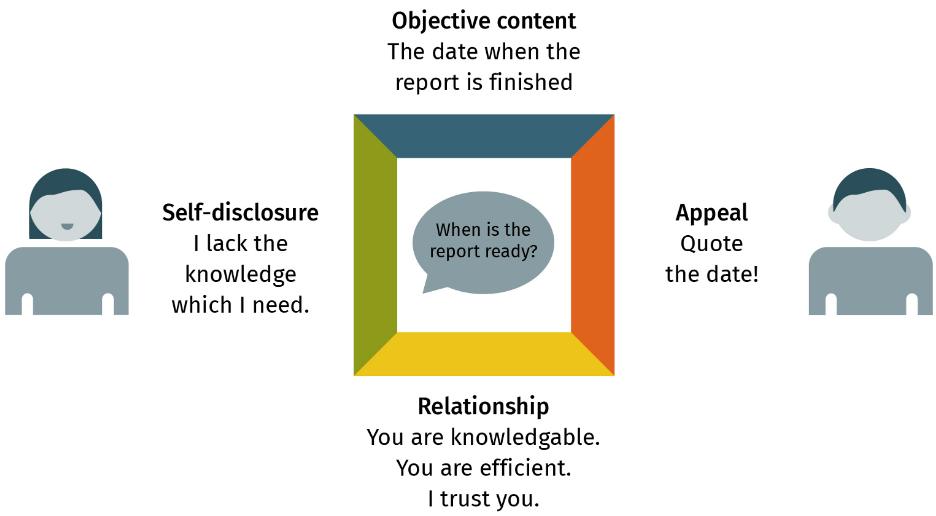
Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on ("Stages of Listening," n.d.).

Listening with Four Ears

What makes listening challenging is that each statement contains four different aspects and hence four potential areas of misunderstandings. According to Schulz von Thun (2008, pp. 10–12, 16–18), with each message the sender delivers objective information on the factual side of the message. On the self-disclosure side, they tell something about themselves, whether it be intentional self-presentation or involuntary self-revelation. The relationship side contains information about the relationship between sender and receiver (we-message) and what the sender thinks about the receiver (you-message). What the sender intends with their message is found on the appeal side of the message.

The receiver needs to decode the received message considering these four aspects to gain a full understanding of the message. In other words, the receiver needs to listen with "four ears." Listening with their factual ear, the receiver tries to understand the factual meaning of the message. The self-disclosure ear has a diagnostic function and asks what kind of person and in which emotional state the sender is. The receiver feels personally touched by the relationship aspect of the message that reveals how the sender sees and treats them. With the appeal ear, the receiver asks what the sender wants from them. Misunderstandings can arise on all four sides. If a boss asks, for example, “When is the report ready?”, their question can include the implicit relationship message that they know their staff to be very efficient and fast, as depicted in the picture below.

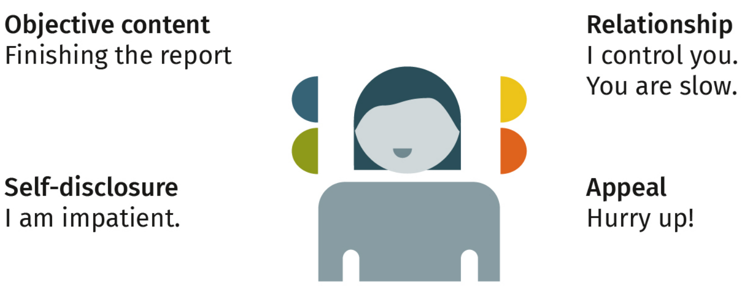
Figure 13: Four Aspects of a Message



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Schulz von Thun (2008, p. 12).

The staff, however, may feel that the boss mistrusts them and thinks that they are slow; therefore, the boss needs to control the staff so that they won’t fall into laziness.

Figure 14: The Four Ears of the Listener



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022) based on Schulz von Thun (2008, p. 16)

In the previous example, if the staff's response reveals their irritation (for instance by asking: "Do you think I should work faster on the report?)", the boss can correct the misunderstanding on the relationship-side of the message and express their trust in the staff's efficiency. If the staff keep their irritation to themselves, the relationship between them and the boss might suffer. Furthermore, they might become more sensitive to the relationship aspect of the boss' future messages to verify or falsify that they have a "trust-issue" with the boss. In other words, in following conversations they might focus on the relationship side of the message and their relationship ear is bigger than the other three. If our listening is one-sided, we can miss other important aspects of the message. Besides, communicative disturbances may arise if our response is based on this imbalanced reception.

The dominance of a receiving ear may be due to situational circumstances (for instance, if we are in a hurry, we tend to focus on the appeal side) or due to the state of the relationship (as in the example with the boss and their staff). Our listening tendency can be rather stable across situations and can also reveal a personal characteristic. People-oriented listeners, for example, are concerned about the others' needs and emotions and generally concentrate on self-disclosure aspects. They may get distracted from the factual and appeal aspect of a conversation. Action-oriented listeners, on the contrary, focus on the appeal side and the tasks that need to be accomplished and may overlook people's needs. Content-oriented listeners focus on the factual side and try to understand the information thoroughly. They tend to get lost in their analysis and forget about people and time constraints (Communication, 2016, p. 237; Hargie, 2017, p. 182).

Barriers to Listening

With one-sided listening, we have already investigated one barrier to accurate listening. Other barriers to listening can originate in the message, the environment, human cognition, the constitution of the receiver and the receiver's attitude.

Message

The content and delivery of the message can make listening difficult. The content can be too abstract, unorganized, or complex. Besides, the speaker can speak too fast, unarticulated, or hushed and thus making listening difficult (Communication, 2016, p. 246; Hargie, 2017, pp. 195-196). Moreover, the message can be part of so many messages and can contribute to the message overload, which makes it impossible to listen carefully to everything (Adler et al., 2017, p. 129).

Environment

The environment can obstruct listening, particularly in the first stage of the listening process. Traffic noise or a loud machine can interfere with the reception of auditory signals, as can bad lightning hinder the reception of visual nonverbal cues (Hargie, 2017, p. 194).

Human cognition

The default of human cognition can impede accurate listening. Human perception cannot process all available sensory information. Hence, in the reception phase of listening, our attention selects and thus limits the incoming stimuli. Most stimuli do not pass our selective perception filter and are not received (Hargie, 2017, pp. 179–180). Cognition then processes the received stimuli. It can process between 400 and 800 words per minute, while people produce only 125 to 175 words per minute. The gap between the speech and thought rate allows us to process other thoughts or to daydream and distract ourselves from listening attentively (Communication, 2016, p. 243; Hargie, 2017, p. 195).

Cognitive dissonance
This mental discomfort results from a contradiction e.g., of one's beliefs and new information.

In addition, in the understanding phase of listening, the existing cognitive schemata influence the way we interpret incoming information. Humans have the tendency to adapt new information to old information in order to avoid **cognitive dissonance**. Moreover, cognitive schemata help humans to reduce complexity by organizing people into social groups and expecting similar behavior from members of the same group. These stereotypes and generalizations can be helpful. However, they can make us overlook and overhear nonconforming information and lead to misinterpretations, both of which constrain accurate listening (Hargie, 2017, p. 199). Understanding can also be difficult if interlocutors share little in terms of background, and thus use very different cognitive schema to assign meaning to words (Hargie, 2017, p. 200).

Constitution

Besides our cognitive setup, our constitution can be a barrier to accurate listening. Physiological conditions such as a physical illness can affect our ability to concentrate on listening, or an impairment can handicap our listening. Moreover, our current emotional state can obstruct quality listening (Communication, 2016, p. 243). If we anxiously worry about a personal problem or are newly in love, our thoughts may circle around ourselves rather than focusing on our interlocutor; or if we are under time pressure, we might not take the time to listen carefully.

Attitude

The receiver's attitude can be a barrier to quality listening. Culturally, individualistic societies, like the US or many European countries, value speaking over listening. Good speakers are rewarded and speaking skills are trained. Hence, communicators are not only less motivated to listen well, but they tend to use the time when their interlocutor is speaking to prepare their own response which further impedes their listening. In general, we humans are rather self-centered creatures. We selectively attend to the information beneficial to us, and neglect other information (Communication, 2016, p. 244). We are more concerned with our own point of view than gaining a deeper insight into the others' perspectives (Hargie, 2017, p. 178). To this end, Oscar Wilde stated, "Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens one may be convinced" (Communication, 2016, p. 246).

Problematic Listening Habits

Problematic habits such as interruptions, as well as distorted, aggressive, narcissistic and pseudo listening can further endanger quality listening.

Interruptions

A fluid conversation unfolds when communicators competently take conversational turns. In contrast, both intentional and unintentional interruptions can be symptoms of a problematic listening habit. Unintentional interruptions can happen if we do not pay enough attention to the nonverbal and verbal cues that indicate turn taking (Communication, 2016, p. 239). Interruptions impact our interlocutors negatively; for example, regarding their satisfaction with the conversation (Hargie, 2017, p. 187). Intentional interruptions, that can derive from the attempt to dominate a conversation, are clearly the opposite of good listening (Communication, 2016, p. 239).

Distorted listening

Distorted listening happens when we omit parts of the message, add material to the message, or change the message. This can happen rather unintentionally when we adapt incoming information to our existing schemata, reattribute the cause of something to be in line with our beliefs, or miss parts of the message due to our selective attention. If we intentionally add inaccurate information to the message and spread it, we'll engage actively in gossiping and the spreading of false rumors (Communication, 2016, p. 248).

Aggressive listening

Aggressive listening is the problematic habit of using what someone has said to attack them (Communication, 2016, p. 249). The aggressive listener can focus on the factual side of the message to find faults for later references (Adler et al., 2017, p. 132); or use the self-disclosure information that someone reveals as a weapon against them. For instance, if somebody says that they "were pondering on this point," the aggressive listener could argue that their interlocutor is in doubt about the point. Aggressive listening has commonalities with defensive listening, where listeners are not really interested in understanding the other person but in justifying themselves (Adler et al., 2017, p. 132).

Narcissistic listening

Narcissistic listeners bring the human tendency of self-centeredness to an extreme. In this self-absorbed listening practice, listeners make the conversation about themselves by interrupting or changing the topic (Communication, 2016, p. 250; Hargie, 2017, p. 194).

Pseudo-listening

We have all most certainly engaged in the problematic habit of pseudo-listening, when we pretend to listen while paying attention to something else. With this practice, we often try to be polite or omit confrontation (Communication, 2016, p. 251). Although it is highly understandable, especially if speakers repeat their messages, it is obviously not a great listening habit; it can also backfire if found out. Moreover, it is the reason why some speakers react “allergically” to backchannel cues as they are sometimes used in pseudo-listening to fake attentive listening.

Active Listening

If you find your behaviour reflected in the problematic listening habits or you are discouraged by the barriers of listening, do not lose heart. You can change your listening practice for the better with intentional effort. Active listening can serve as a model. It was introduced by Carl Rogers (Rogers & Farson, 2015), and it pairs outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices (Bodie, 2018, p. 276; Communication, 2016, p. 254). With active listening, we can overcome the barriers to quality listening we discussed above.

For training purposes, we can picture active listening with three different levels as in the graphic below. Focus on each level and only tackle the next level after you have mastered the lower one. The first level aims at the relationship and establishing connection and trust. It is all about the willingness to truly focus on our interlocutors and to pay them our full attention. This attitude finds expression in the active listening behaviors of back-channel cues, eye contact, and forward body lean (Communication, 2016, p. 258). The aim of the second level is content clarification. We foster mutual understanding on the factual side by paraphrasing, summarizing, and asking clarifying questions (Communication, 2016, pp. 256–257). Paraphrasing is using our own words to mention the essential facts of the others’ messages. It is not echoing or repeating the others’ statements, but a reformulation of the core (Hargie, 2017, p. 160). Hence, the paraphrase should be concise, specific, and accurate and provide a summary (Hargie, 2017, p. 170). Questions should be used carefully in order not to lead our interlocutors away from their topic. The aim is to check for accuracy of understanding, not the introduction of a new topic.

During active listening, some tools can help us with concentration and memory. With metacognition, we can monitor our own thoughts. When we realize that we are distracted, we can use mental bracketing and intentionally let intrusive thoughts pass through our mind without paying further attention to them (Communication, 2016, p. 264). Note-taking can help us stay focused on the content and enhance our memory (Hargie, 2017, pp. 190–191). If we plan to take notes, we should mention it to our interlocutor (Communication, 2016, p. 265). Many content-focused conversations in the workplace only require the lower two levels of active listening.

However, if we realize that our interlocutor is emotionally aroused and the (underlying) emotions interfere with the content, we should not shy away from labeling and exploring them so that they become tangible and explicit. On this level, paraphrasing becomes “reflecting” or “mirroring back” and goes beyond the factual side and verbal communication, as the affective matters may be expressed **explicitly** or **implicitly**. In this context, the paraphrase presents a hypothesis about what respondents mean or feel and strives to capture the essence of the feelings (Hargie, 2017, p. 155, 163). This third level of active listening becomes even more relevant when we have a role in counselling, coaching, or therapy, and it is sometimes referred to as supportive listening (Bodie, 2018, p. 276) or active-empathic listening (Communication, 2016, p. 261).

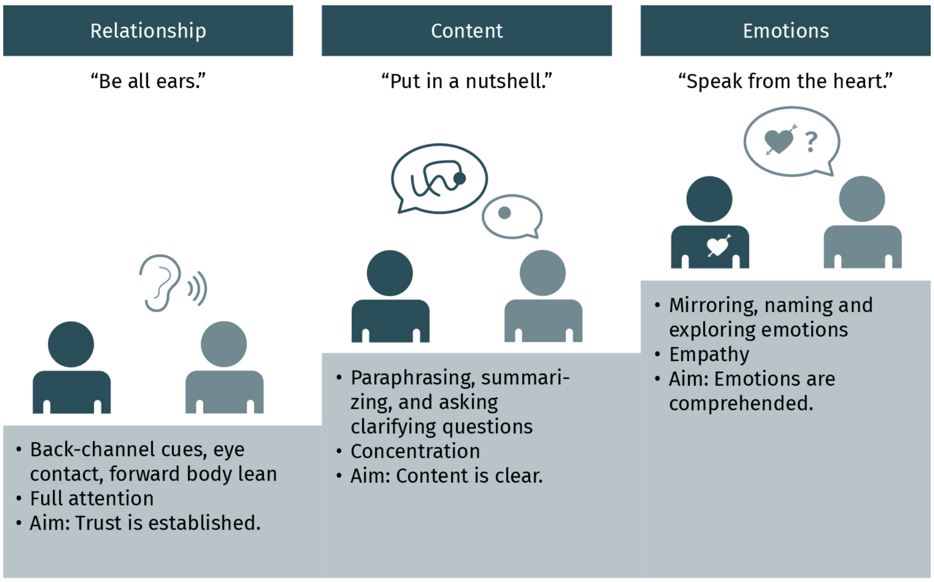
Explicit
This means expressed with words.

Implicit
This means non-verbally expressed or “between the lines” by para- or non-verbal cues.

Active-empathic listeners show their attention to their interlocutors and their interest in accurately understanding them (Hargie, 2017, p. 159). They are consciously emotionally involved in communication and approach the speaker non-judgmentally. They may engage in mirroring and replicate the nonverbal cues of the speaker. Through these means, they can build **rapport** and convey empathy (Communication, 2016, p. 262). They can facilitate their interlocutors' self-exploration, comprehension, and clarity regarding the communicated issues (Hargie, 2017, p. 159). They place the emphasis of the conversation on their interlocutors and welcome their feelings (Hargie, 2017, p. 160).

Rapport
It means a warm relationship characterized by acceptance and trust.

Figure 15: Three Levels of Active Listening



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022)

4.2 Perspective-Taking

Active listening is a suitable communication technique for exploring our interlocutors' perspective. Through it, we can strive to overcome self-centeredness as well as our own centrality in our perceptual world (Communication, 2016, p. 236). Perspective-taking can be defined as "the active cognitive process of imagining the world from another's vantage point or imagining oneself in another's shoes to understand their visual viewpoint, thoughts, motivations, intentions, and/or emotions" (Ku et al., 2015, p. 79). With this definition perspective-taking is distinguished from empathy. Empathy is not only understanding the others' positions but imaging being in their position, which results in a more emotional reaction (Ku et al., 2015, p. 81). Empathy means to "feel into" or "feel with" another person (Communication, 2016, p. 236). Perspective-taking and empathy are other-oriented, i.e., viewing the world through the others' eyes, but perspective-taking keeps more of an emotional distance. Empathy is about sharing someone's emotional experience either because you have experienced the same or you imagine being in their situation. Both should not be confused with sympathy, which means to “feel for” someone and is more self-oriented. Sympathy is your emotional reaction to someone’s experience, such as pity.

Perspective-taking is an important skill of leadership communication because leaders must understand what motivates the customers and employees. Besides, they need to negotiate with clients and vendors, manage diversity, and resolve conflicts (Ku et al., 2015, p. 79). Regarding motivating the employees, perspective-taking allows the leaders to identify their followers’ intrinsic motives (which are originated from the activity itself), and lead them **transformational** rather than **transactional** with extrinsic rewards (for instance salary). Transformational leadership that inspires employees to reach a common goal is associated with benefits for the organization in the long-term as is strategic management, which is also enabled by perspective-taking capability (Ku et al., 2015, p. 92). Negotiating in general and conflict-resolving in particular call for the ability of perspective-taking. In both cases negotiators should be able to understand where the other party is communing from and to articulate this understanding in a way that shows appreciation for this perspective. Furthermore, before a proposal is presented, negotiators need to understand the other party’s concerns and anticipate the reasons why they may accept or reject a proposal (Hargie, 2017, p. 426). In summary, perspective-taking can support the leaders to effectively navigate today’s complex mixed-motive world (Ku et al., 2015, p. 95).

Transformational
This leadership style inspires to reach a common goal.

Transactional
In this leadership style, benefits are exchanged for compliance.

4.3 Questioning

In relationship to listening, we have already learned about clarifying questions. More generally, questions are powerful tools in interpersonal communication. They can controll and manage information and interaction (Stapleton, 2018, pp. 153–154). We will learn about open and closed, primary and secondary, tag, rhetorical, and suggestive questions as well as their power.

Open and Closed Questions

Questions can be distinguished according to the extent to which they restrict the scope of response. Closed questions retrieve specific and often pre-determined information (Stapleton, 2018, p. 142). Examples of closed questions are polar questions, which are answered with yes or no and made up 70 percent of all the questions asked in casual conversations in a US study (Stivers, 2010, p. 2776). Alternative questions present two or more options, which the respondent is forced to choose from. Identification questions usually contain a question-word such as “what,” “where,” “which,” “when,” or “who” (Hargie, 2017, p. 125; Stapleton, 2018, pp. 142–143); for example, “What was the topic of the presentation?”.

Open questions, in contrast, aim for elaborating on the response rather than restricting it. They may contain question words, as in, for example, “What was your impression of the presentation?”; but they can also include declaratives, such as “that must have been an interesting presentation for you, with new insights." or invitations to elaborate, such as "tell me what you think about the presentation." Open questions usually elicit longer answers (Hargie, 2017, p. 126).

Regarding their use, closed questions are appropriate for opening and controlling interaction, eliciting specific information, and testing or assessment purposes (Stapleton, 2018, p. 143). Open questions are useful for the in-depth exploration of issues, gaining new knowledge, expressing concern or interest, and empowering the addressed person (Stapleton, 2018, p. 143). Hence, counsellors use open questions and can thereby establish an empathic relationship and support (self-) exploration in clients (Stapleton, 2018, pp. 143–144). Open and closed questions can also alter during a conversation (Stapleton, 2018, p. 144). An open question can, for example, initiate a brainstorming on solution ideas, whereas a closed question can lead to a decision for choosing one of the ideas.

Primary and Secondary (Probing) Questions

Primary questions that introduce topics and interactions can be distinguished from secondary or probing questions that follow up on responses. Primary questions initiate, shape, and control the conversation. Secondary or probing questions sustain interaction and develop the depth and detail of the communication issue. Following an answer to a primary question, the questioner can explore the answer further by probing questions that, for example, request an explanation or justification of a stated opinion or examples. Good interviewers make effective use of probing questions and gain coherent in-depth knowledge of the interview topic rather than ending up with a lot of unconnected information (Stapleton, 2018, p. 144). An example for a probing question is "Could you tell me more about this?".

Tag Questions

The first part of a tag question is a declarative sentence. It is followed by a shortened question referred to as "tag"; for instance, "You are late with the report, aren't you?". The first part contains the expected response whereas the tag contrasts with it. Intonation is central to conveying the meaning of tag questions: Tags with rising intonation seek verification or falsification whereas those with falling intonation expect confirmation (Stapleton, 2018, p. 145).

Rhetorical Questions

Tag questions with a falling intonation are also examples of rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions do not seek a verbal but rather a mental response. They often make a claim or an assertion of the opposite polarity to the question; for example, "Am I the only one who thinks it is impossible to meet the deadline?" implies that everyone believes that the deadline cannot be met. The function of rhetorical questions can be persuasion and influence, but more generally they may raise attention and engage the audience (Communication, 2016, p. 472).

Suggestive Questions

Some rhetorical questions are also suggestive and already include the suggested answer, as in the example with the impossible deadline above. Others falsely present a presupposition in the question as an accepted fact; for example, “Given that the deadline is impossible to meet, what other solutions have we got?”. Such assumption-laden questions are also called (mis)leading questions (Hargie, 2017, p. 134).

Other types of suggestive questions are repeated questions, as they suggest that the first response wasn’t correct; or confirmatory questions, which establish and confirm a one-sided perspective on an issue, for example: “Is it in the interest of the company to save production costs? Is it then not beneficial to have more work done by less staff? Isn’t then the consequence a high workload and tight deadlines?”. If we are under the impression that the questioner wants to manipulate us with a suggestive question, we can scrutinize the presumption and ask, for example: “Why is it impossible to meet the deadline?”; or add the counter-perspective: “Is it in the interest of the company to be reliable? Should the deadlines not be set in a way that allow on-time delivery to appear reliable?”.

The Power of Questions

We have already learned that questions have the power to control the response. Generally, they can manage both the content and the structure of a conversation (Stapleton, 2018, p. 145). In the workplace, interactions questions can serve as “control devices”. Independent of their intention to facilitate interaction, give directives, elicit information, or challenge, they usually exercise influence on the others’ behaviors (Stapleton, 2018, p. 146). Questions also function to enact leadership or establish authority. Research revealed that leaders ask more questions, and the type of their questions reflects their leadership style, such as directive or collaborative. In general, questions indicate status; the questioner is usually a person of higher status or is in control (Hargie, 2017, p. 122). Besides, questions influence the addressed persons’ attitudes, self-perceptions, perception by others, and behaviors (Stapleton, 2018, p. 146). Vivid examples can be found in the courtrooms where attorneys (try to) use strategic and suggestive questioning to influence the defendants’ and witnesses’ answers and the way they are perceived by judges or juries (Hargie, 2017, p. 118).

4.4 I-Language

With the use of I- and you-language, we can manage the power of affective messages. In this unit, the initial example of the boss’ question, “When is the report ready?”, is predominantly factual and the affective messages of self-disclosure and relationship are implicit. The receiver may infer them from the context or from the non-linguistic cues of the sender. Besides, the receiver can be emotionally affected by them; this in turn can influence the sender-receiver relationship (Hargie, 2017, pp. 158–159).

Messages with an explicit relationship message are even more powerful. For instance, if the boss says “You excelled at the writing of this report. You are very competent.”, this you-message can affect the employee and the boss-employee relationship positively. On the contrary, a critical message in bland you-language, such as “The report was late, you are unreliable.”, will impact the employee negatively and she might feel attacked and become defensive. This does not mean that the boss should not mention her disappointment about a missed deadline.

However, if the boss reminds herself that her perception can be distorted and humans, for example, tend to falsely attribute the others’ shortcomings to their character rather than to circumstances, she might better use I-language. She could say: “The report was late, and I am disappointed as I relied on you for it.” In this statement, the boss owns her emotions and thoughts and does not present them as objective truths. This can invite the employee to share the reasons the report was late and to apologize. Consequently, the relationship can be restored rather than further damaged by a defensive counterattack of the employee (Communication, 2016, pp. 133–147). Thomas Gordon (2000) introduced the technique of I-language and claimed its effectiveness in making the receivers feel accepted and empowered to own their problems and to solve them self-reliantly.

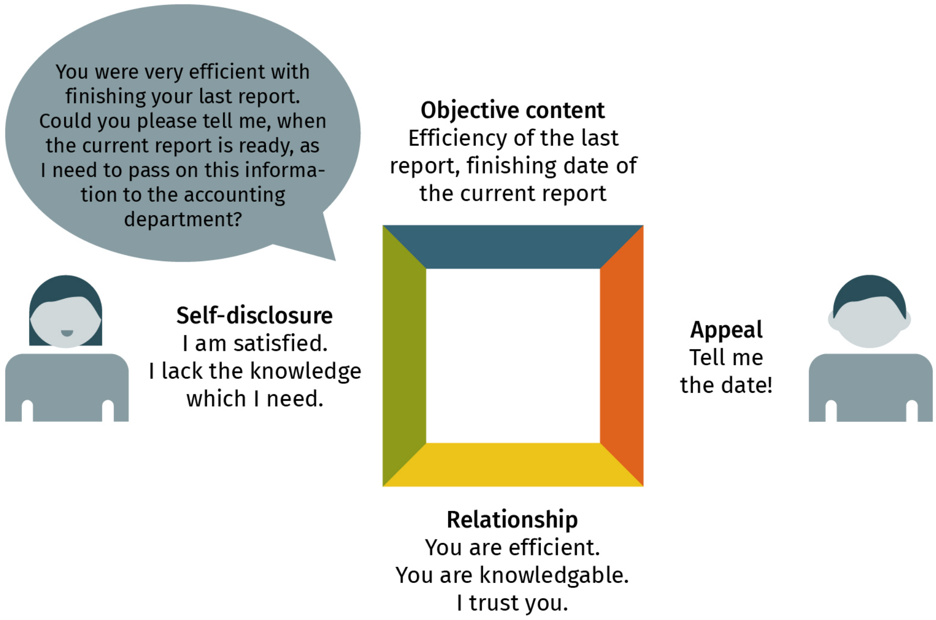
4.5 Complete Messages

Explicitly covering all four sides of a message or using the four dimensions of non-violent communication can complete messages and reduce misunderstandings and irritations.

Complete Four-Sided Messages

As the question about the finishing date of the report does not contain an explicit relationship aspect, the employee has freedom in what her relationship ear receives (Schulz von Thun, 2008, p. 17). For a variety of possible reasons-for example, the experiences of her current or a previous boss criticizing her or her physiological or psychological constitution of being fatigued and anxious as her baby is sick-she might use this freedom in interpretation and receive a negative relationship message of being unreliable, although her boss did not intend this meaning. To reduce the likeliness of such misunderstandings to happen, we can send complete messages which explicitly cover all four aspects. Following this suggestion, the boss could say: “You were very efficient with finishing your last report. Could you please tell me when the current report is ready, as I need to pass on this information to the accounting department?” In this example, there is little room for interpretation on all four sides of the message, as the boss has explicitly mentioned the reason she needs the information and her satisfaction with the employee’s work efficiency. Hence, accurate reception is more likely, and misunderstandings are less prone. Obviously, it is not practical to complete every message; but if we touch on sensitive topics, this communication technique can be appropriate.

Figure 16: A Complete Four-Sided Message



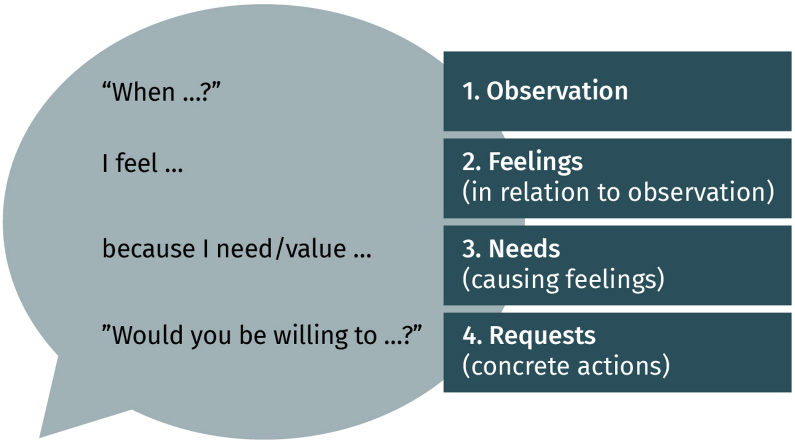
Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Schulz von Thun (2008, pp. 9–18).

Non-Violent Messages

The four steps of non-violent communication (NVC) also help us to make explicit what are otherwise rather implicit aspects. To create a non-violent message, we use the four components of observations, feelings, needs, and requests, as in the following example: "When I see that you miss the deadlines, I feel anxious because I value punctuality and reliability. Would you be willing to take better care to meet the deadlines? And if you realize that you cannot meet one, inform me as soon as possible so that we can work on a solution." As can be seen from this example, NVC also relies on I-language. Marshall B. Rosenberg, the founder of non-violent communication, claims that if we modify our verbal expressions to follow these steps, we do not harm the others with our language. The prerequisites to doing so include being able to actively listen, avoid automatic reactions, take the others' perspectives, and perceive and communicate our own needs.

Moreover, we need to learn to separate observations from judgements, to take responsibility for our feelings (as others may trigger but not cause them), and to avoid demands in favor of requests. In NVC, communication is understood as a reciprocal exchange with two parts. The first part is about expressing ourselves honestly with the four components, and the second part is to receive the messages empathically through the lens of the four components (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015, pp. 6–7).

Figure 17: The Four Components of NVC



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022)

4.6 Meta-Communication

However skilled and complete our communication is, misunderstandings and irritation still occur. Rather than anxiously trying to avoid them, we should prepare ourselves and develop strategies to handle them. Meta-communication can be a useful intervention technique. It is a communication about the way we communicate with each other (Schulz von Thun, 2008, p. 7). It reflects our interaction on a meta- level or from a distance. Meta-communication can be initiated with the help of the square of communication. For example, we can meta-communicate to evaluate our regular team meetings. Regarding the content, we can ask "How satisfied are you with the topics of our meetings and their structure?". Regarding self-disclosure side, we can ask "How satisfied are you with your contribution to our meetings and your role?". Regarding the relationship side, we can gather information with the following question: "How satisfied are you with the team atmosphere in our meetings and with the way we interact with and treat each other?". To elicit appeals, we can ask "If everything were up to you, what would you suggest to change and what to keep the same in our meetings?".

4.7 Neuro-Linguistic Programming Techniques

The the school of thought called Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) offers a plethora of communication tools and techniques. While some might be reserved for coaching contexts, some can be used to enhance our everyday conversations. Before they are introduced, we explore the key presuppositions of NLP.

NLP uses the understanding of the basic processes of human perception and experience to change or re-program our understanding of the world and thus our behavior. Perception starts with the body sensing the incoming information on the VAKOG channels (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 35–43). VAKOG stands for the five visual, auditory, kinesthetic (sometimes called cutaneous), olfactory, and gustatory senses. Our brain interprets the incoming stimuli and assigns meaning; this interpretation leads to an emotion. Our attention can grasp the stimulus and the emotion, the rest happens unconsciously.

Human perception does not simply replicate the outside world, it employs the three strategies of generalization, deletion, and distortion. Generalization combines similar experiences into one category and forms the beliefs consisting of the generalized characteristics of this category of experiences. After they are formed, the beliefs filter the incoming information. Deletion is the brain's answer to the overwhelming amount of available information. It selects only the salient stimuli and ignores the other sensory inputs. Distortion modifies the incoming information so that it fits our existing beliefs.

The picture of the world which we see and live in is only inside our head. Our mind, the essence which makes us feel like ourselves, uses pictures, sounds, feelings, smells, and tastes or the five languages of the senses to record experiences. Usually, a person favors one of the five modes of representation (rep mode) over the others. When we recall an experience, we can change it by combining the remembered elements, imagined experiences, and ideas (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 35–43). One way of intentionally changing experiences is working on their submodalities. Submodalities are the qualities of a representational system. For instance, visual submodalities include relative size, location, brightness, and sharpness of internal visualizations (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 61–66). In general, human memory is pliable. Some of our experiences do not originate in the outside world but are internally generated.

Recalls, memories, imaginations, fantasies, and all other thoughts form our internal maps, which consist of experiences represented in the five modes. Some of our maps are consciously available, others need to be brought into awareness. We respond emotionally to our maps of reality not to reality itself. If a map with its belief pattern changes, our emotions will change and so will the related behavioral response. Every behavior strives to fulfill a basic human need, such as love, safety, or autonomy, and is useful in some context. However, it may not be satisfactory in the context it is currently applied to.

To achieve more satisfactory results, we may develop other behavioral choices, for example, by imagining a different behavior or modeling it from others. If the application of the new behavior does not prove to be successful, we can use this feedback as a guide in experimenting with other choices. Choices allow for greater behavioral flexibility. Communication is not defined by our intention but by the feedback it receives. Communication with others determines how we are treated by them. The way we communicate with ourselves creates our personal experience (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 35–43). Hence, we can use our internal communication to change our neuro-linguistic programming. These changes to our internal maps of how we think about the world will also change our behavior in the world (Hoobyar et al., 2013, p. 32).

Based on these presuppositions, NLP offers many techniques aimed at replacing maladaptive with more productive thought patterns, which will positively influence behavior. We will look into meta-model questions, the well-informed outcome, reframing, chunking, anchoring, and metaphors.

Meta-Model Questions

What senders communicate verbally is a reduced representation of their mental map. The map's deep structure is translated into the surface structure of linguistic expressions using generalization, deletion, and distortion. The listeners then re-transform the received surface structure into the deep structure of their mental maps. The individuality of mental maps leads to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. To re-do the effect of generalization, deletion, and distortion and to elicit a fuller representation of the sender's mental map, NLP recommends the use of meta-model questions.

In the case of deletion, the sender can for example say: "I am no more afraid." And the receiver can ask: "of what?", as a meta-model question. If the strategy of distortion is employed and the sender says, "She makes me angry.", the receiver can ask, "Which of her behaviors makes you feel angry?". In reaction to generalizations in the sender's message, for example, "All Germans are boring.", the receiver can ask, "Don't you know one German who is a little bit funny?" (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 132–133). These questions help to retrieve lost information.

Well-Formed Outcome

If our conversational set-up involves goal setting, we can use the following six questions to define the frame for a desired outcome (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 53–55):

1. What specifically do you want?
2. How will you know when you achieve what you want?
3. Under what circumstances, where, when, and with whom do you want to have this result?
4. What stops you from having your desired outcome already?
5. What resources will you need to help you create what you want?
6. How are you going to get there and what's the first step to achieve this result?

Answering all these questions will define a desired outcome that is achievable, appropriate, and measurable.

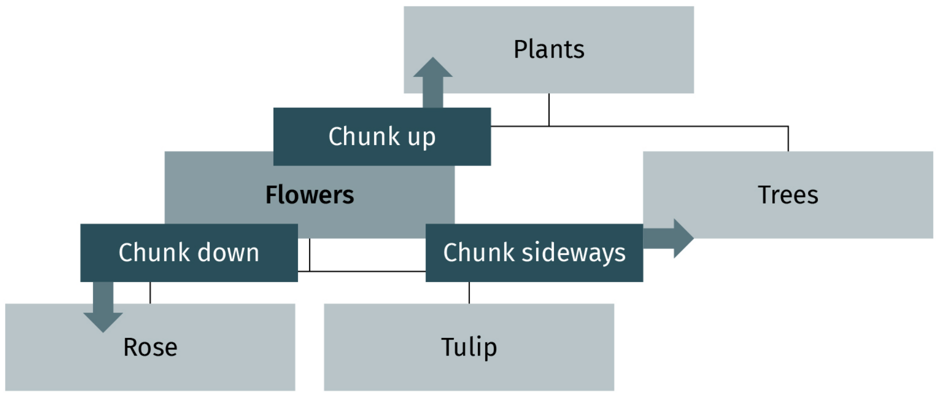
Reframing

If our conversation seems to get stuck, we can use reframing to offer a different perspective or angle to look at an issue. This technique may change the perception of the experience, the meaning assigned to it, and finally the behavior. For instance, your interlocutors may say, "I can't …". To reframe this statement, you can say, "mm-hmm, so you want to …?". By this simple reframing, you have moved their brain's focus from an impossible to a desired activity (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 280–283). Reframing is a popular NLP technique but not its original one.

Chunking

Chunking is about bite-size information. In NLP, this term refers to the abstraction level of the communication content. Depending on where we want to guide the focus of our interlocutors, we can use three directions of chunking. If you are chunking a piece of information up, you make it more abstract to focus on the general tendency. Down-chunking makes the information less abstract and uses a more specific category to focus on details. If you chunk laterally or sideways, you use another category on the same level of abstraction to, for example, foster creativity in a brainstorming session (Hoobyar et al., 2013, p. 406).

Figure 18: A Chunking Example



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022).

Anchoring

Anchors are based on the connection between a specific stimulus and an emotional state. Once they are established, exposure to the stimulus triggers the emotional state automatically. NLP deliberately uses anchoring and associates, for instance, a particular touch with a memory or emotional state. Each time we employ the touch, this anchor can serve as a mental sticky note that helps us recall a positive mental state (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 26–31; p. 405). This technique can, for example, help us fight stage anxiety or improve our emotional state during a difficult conversation.

Metaphors

NLP uses simple figures of speech, analogies, parables, and stories to relate experiences or tell confrontational truth (Hoobyar et al., 2013, pp. 290–293; p. 409). These linguistic tools can engage fewer conscious parts of the mind and help find and challenge basic assumptions and beliefs. For example, in the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who makes a lot of effort to search for a sheep, although it is one out of 100, rather than saying “God loves you and is looking for you.” This bland statement can put the listeners off, but the parable gives the listeners the freedom to identify with the lost sheep and understand God’s love for them.

SUMMARY

A competent communicator uses a variety of communication skills and techniques. Listening is a core skill of communication competence. If we cannot overcome the listening barriers or if we engage in problematic listening habits, the success of the conversation is at stake. Knowledge about the process of listening, the four ears of the listener, and practicing active listening can help in achieving a higher listening accuracy. Accurate listening enables perspective-taking, which is an important leadership skill, as it allows one to identify and handle the mixed motives of interaction partners in today’s complex world. Questioning is a powerful skill for the management of conversations. Questions control the structure and content of conversations and can establish authority and leadership. With the technique of I-language, we can regulate the power of affective messages and empower the receivers. Complete messages that either touch all four sides of the message explicitly or follow the four dimensions of non-violent communication can help reduce irritations and misunderstandings. Nevertheless, not all communicative disturbances can be omitted. With the technique of meta-communication, we can tackle them and turn the way we communicate with each other into the topic of our conversations. The techniques of Neuro-Linguistic Programming are based on the presupposition that our internal maps, which are mental representations of the outside world, determine our behaviors. If we re-program these maps, we can gain behavioral flexibility. To achieve this aim, meta-model questions, the well-formed outcome, reframing, chunking, anchoring, and metaphors can be used as effective techniques in everyday conversations.

UNIT 5

COMMUNICATION AT WORK

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

- understand the different dimensions of communication in the workplace.
- know the fundamentals of team communication.
- identify the different areas of intervention in corporate communication.
- design strategic interventions according to different public communication objectives.

5. COMMUNICATION AT WORK

Introduction

An organization is composed of people who share a set of meanings in their daily interactions. Therefore, the communication dynamic at work is essential for performance quality, the conditions of interaction, and work climate. In this framework, we will explore different dimensions of communication at work. We will start with the interpersonal form of communication in dyads and different manifestations according to the relationships of responsibility. Then we will analyze the modes of communication in teams, the importance of communication for team leadership, goal setting, and role management. The last point in this unit relates to two key aspects of organizational communication. First, we will address the strategic perspective of corporate communication as an integrating strategic approach. Second, we will detail the field of intervention of public relations as one of the disciplines integrated in the corporate communication strategy. All together this chapter will allow you to understand the complexity of the different instances of communication and the importance of its management for the development of corporate goals, the dynamics of internal culture, and the position of the organization in society.

5.1 Communication in Dyads

Perhaps the first image that comes to mind when thinking of an organization is a building, a government institution, or a store. However, beyond legal, economic, and financial structures, organizations are people who interact to carry out particular objectives. Organizations are networks of people who communicate with each other (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 13). Hence, communication in the **workplace** is not exclusively related to the exchange of technical information to develop a task. On the contrary, we can think of it as the structure that sustains daily relationships and thus the organization. There are many instances of communication in organizations. The simplest communication unit is between two people. Dyadic communication is the process of using messages to generate meaning between at least two people in a situation that allows mutual opportunities to talk and to listen (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 19). This type of communication occurs for a variety of reasons: to solve problems, resolve conflicts, share information, improve self-perception, or satisfy social needs (Beauchamp & Baran, 2015, p. 119). This means that a common goal connects the interlocutors, and their decisions affect each other. In this framework, Child (2017, p. 120) posits three elements that characterize these interpersonal relationships: a communicative encounter, shared meanings, and social goals. Let us look at these aspects in more detail.

Workplace
This term implies the physical workspace but goes beyond it and refers to the workers' overall experience in the work environment.

Encounter Conditions

The first aspect of interpersonal relations is that the communicative act implies an encounter between at least two people. This point may seem obvious, but it is not necessarily so. The encounter implies the recognition of the other party as an interlocutor. This means recognition of intentions, needs, and desires to engage in the act of communication. Just think about how often we answer e-mails, messages, and hallway encounters without paying attention or connecting with the other party. How often have we responded to questions automatically or stereotypically without attending or listening to the other person's requirements?

Shared Meanings

This point is the core of the relationship because it makes the difference between transmission and communication. In transmission, one person can deliver certain information to another without further interaction. When a communicative relationship is established, there is an exchange of personal meanings. For example, people exchange feelings, opinions, ideas, values, and beliefs through words, gestures, voice tones, and body postures. This interaction usually manifests as a subtle negotiation in pursuit of a goal. This point is significant because a fluid relationship seeks to reach a shared purpose; a power relationship, on the contrary, seeks to impose particular meanings on the other person and to win in the negotiation over the other relationship partners.

Social Objectives

Communication always has a sense of exchange and influence on the parties' specific behaviors or emotional states. The social objective of communication is that messages are articulated to produce or generate particular consequences for the intervening parties. These effects can be emotional (enthusiasm, joy, concern) or intellectual (understanding, learning, information).

These three aspects will allow you to analyze the conditions of the interaction, whether you are an observer or the protagonist of the interaction. In the first case, you can explore: what the climate of the encounter (calm, tense, constructive) is; what the shared contents (technical, emotional, relational, verbal, nonverbal) are, and what intentions are being negotiated in the interaction. Secondly, if you are the protagonist of the interaction, to take care of the quality of the process, you should ask yourself how to facilitate conditions for dialogue and facilitate the encounter, what meanings you intend to share, and what the objectives of this interaction are.

Communication Dimensions

The quality of communication interventions defines the quality of relationships in organizations because they influence, to some extent, the perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and experiences of people inside and outside organizations (Manucci, 2016, p. 22). As we analyzed in the previous point, communication processes in dyads are not simply the delivery of information between people but rather processes of negotiation of meanings, intentions, and perceptions (De Vito, 2017, p. 13). In exchanging their messages, people negotiate what they believe in, feel, aspire to, and can achieve concerning certain events or situations. As communication is a complex process of meaning negotiation, proper management of communication processes is necessary to facilitate business productivity and favorable working conditions (Ruck, 2019, p. 16). Communication allows access to the appropriate information for the performance of roles and, at the same time, provides a framework for exchange to facilitate interaction. Thus, there are two basic types of communication in the workplace (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016, p. 45):

Technical communication

This is the flow of information related to the roles performed by people. For example, this type of information is needed to perform tasks. This type of communication is essentially delivered through formal channels such as reports, meetings, intranet, and interviews. However, many instances of technical communication also occur in more informal channels such as phone calls, text messages, and casual meetings in physical spaces of the organization (Cornelissen, 2020, p. 254).

Relational communication

This is a flow of communication related to people's behavior and attitudes towards cooperation and integration. This type of communication is necessary to sustain a good climate of relationship and coexistence (Miller, 2012, p. 51). This information can be formal (e.g., milestone celebrations, special employee days, birthday of the month events) or informal (in spontaneous meetings or special activities/channels for each occasion).

Interpersonal communication happens mainly in dialogues. We may wonder, how we can manage them to articulate the technical and relational dimensions of interpersonal relationships smoothly and effectively (Men et al., 2017, p. 120). The possibility of maintaining an open dialogue allows us to explore the alternatives for enriching communication contents. In this sense, Dahlman and Heide (2020) provide a series of parameters that foster effective dialogue as core of interpersonal work relationships (p. 66). According to them, we should...

Create conditions for dialogue. This point implies providing spaces for debate and exchanging ideas in formal and informal meetings. Virtual spaces such as forums, bulletin boards, and discussion groups can also be created. It is essential to circulate and share different points of view on the topics under discussion.

Frame the meaning of the discussions. This instance is critical for people to find the sense of their contribution to the current and future conditions of the topics discussed. The importance of the issues discussed must be preserved in the corporate impact so that the resolutions and topics shared have meaning in their daily lives. One of the most significant aspects of work engagement is that people feel they can contribute to and enrich the analysis of all the issues, especially those under examination.

Share the diversity of perspectives. This aspect is fundamental to exploring different approaches, solutions, and consequences. The fluidity of the exchange is directly related to people's possibilities of expression and listening. Otherwise, there is no dialogue; the meeting simply becomes a monologue that overrides the position and ideas of one of the parties. Diversity of analytical perspectives is an important resource in a world of complex situations because it broadens the analysis of issues and allows the people's knowledge to be enriched by exchanging opinions and visions of the issues.

Give and receive feedback. This exchange is at the core of trust and individual development. Feedback allows for sharing problems, obtaining advice and solutions, and providing support and suggestions. This support becomes a central aspect of effective relationships. It also enriches the communication between individuals and their superiors and peers. Therefore, it is vital to seek help for problems and support in finding shared solutions. This commitment strengthens the relationships and mutual trust because dialogues imply feedback to adjust, share opinions, and incorporate new perspectives.

Communication Levels

In work relationships, positions and roles define the level of responsibility. Responsibility levels and communication objectives define the communication flow (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016, p. 58). Three directions of communication flow in the organization can be determined which are depicted in the graphic below:

Downward vertical communication

In this direction, superiors transfer information or instructions to subordinates. It is the most used communication direction in organizations (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016, p. 57). Superiors can also use this form of communication to motivate and evaluate employees and encourage them to express their opinions. Top-down communication often involves normative content, for example, messages carrying compliance, alignment, reporting, and objectives through formal communication channels (DeVito, 2017, p. 250).

Upward vertical communication

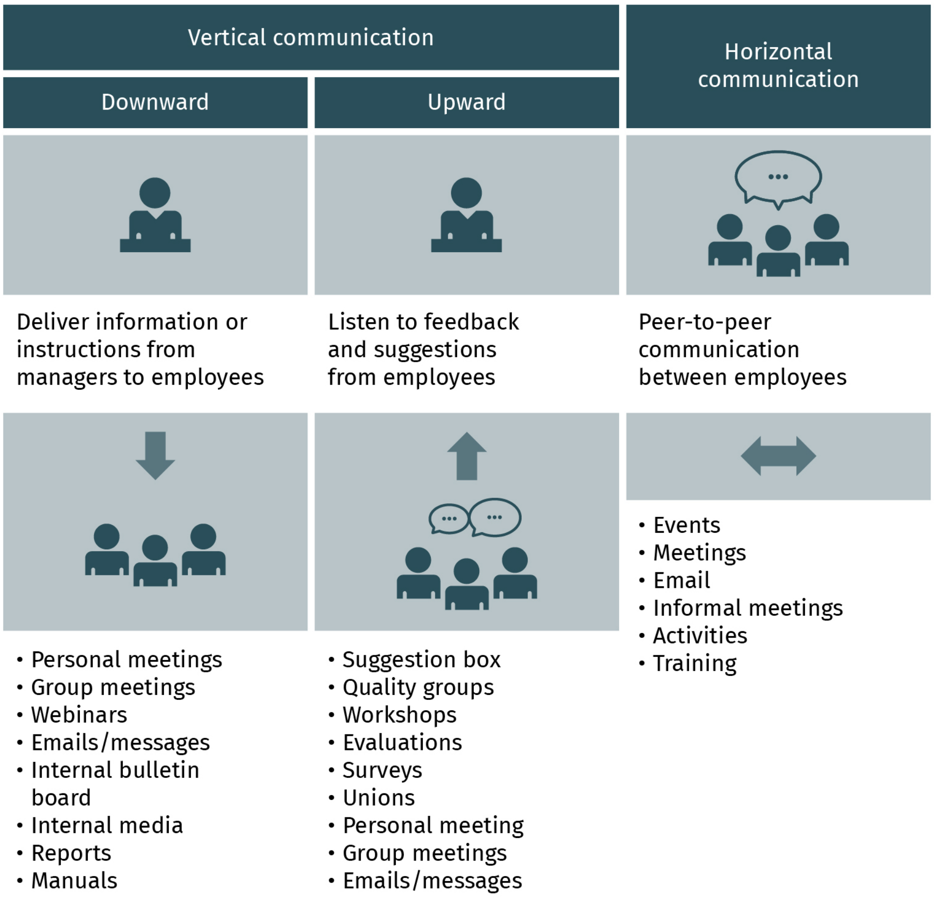
This is a mode of feedback, understood in this case as the response of subordinates to their superiors. It consists mainly of information about the progress of employees' tasks and needs related to the performance of their duties (DeVito, 2017, p. 249). It is also a way for employees to express their opinions and communicate their expectations, requests, or complaints. In many cases, upward communication is the counterpart of downward communication, in which a superior listens to and addresses the requests or comments from their team members (Rothwell, 2017, p. 262). Upward communication can be informal, such as a simple conversation, or formal, such as an evaluation, a poll, or a suggestion board.

Horizontal communication

This is peer-to-peer communication between employees with job positions at the same horizontal level, for example, members of the same workgroup. Within this type of communication, employees can consult, confirm, or supplement the information, or agree on decisions, and allow problems in the company to be solved. Since horizontal communication is much less formal than vertical communication, it helps to maintain the informal contact between employees (Rothwell, 2017, p. 262). This form of communication happens in formal channels such as group meetings or corporate social networks, or in informal encounters such as casual meetings in the organization, group meetings outside the office, and entertainment after office time.

In classic organizations with predominantly transmissive communication models, the predominant flow of communication was downward (Miller, 2012, p. 51). However, with the evolution of society and the growth of competitive demands, organizations have become more flexible, and employee input has become an important resource for decision-making. (Men & Bowen, 2017, p. 24).

Figure 19: Communication Levels



Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on Rogala & Bialowas (2016).

The following table suggests the best practices for each level of organizational communication.

Table 3: Best Practices in Vertical and Horizontal Conversations

Vertical Downward	Vertical Upward	Horizontal
• Speak with a vocabulary that is accessible to every level of employee. • Avoid technical terminology when discussing relational or behavioral issues. • Provide adequate and relevant information to avoid overload and excess of inappropriate data. • Point out critical observations focused on behaviors, not employees' personality, and provide elements for improving practices.	• Enable upward communication that is non-threatening so that employees do not feel at risk in their participation. • Be open to listening to employee feedback and remove barriers so people can access you. • Avoid messages that could be interpreted as sanctions or veiled threats to certain individuals. • Avoid information overload and keep the focus on what is important.	• Share your specialty in a way that is accessible to other colleagues. • Consider the contribution of other specialties to the development of the area or organization. • Balance the needs for cooperation without competing in a way that negatively affects the design. • Engage in conversations that can enrich your professional profile and contribute to the growth of others.

Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on DeVito (2017).

5.2 Communication in Teams

A team is not simply a group of people who collaborate on daily tasks. A group of people does not define a team. For a group of people to become a team, there must be some pillars that define it: a common goal, the rules that organize its internal dynamics, and a clear definition of the roles and functions each member has to fulfill in the team.

Common Goal

In the workplace, people are often structured into teams; however, they do not necessarily form teams as understood in social science. Coexisting in the same space, even with close relationships, is not a sufficient condition for becoming a work team. The necessary condition for a work team is that people work independently based on a shared goal and interact within the rules imposed by the space or organization they work in (Kozlowski & Bell, 2013, p. 415). Therefore, close coexistence does not define a work team but working towards a common goal. Communication in groups should contribute to sustaining the shared goals based on a specific task, provide clarity and avoid overlap in operational roles, and achieve the outlined objectives (DeVito, 2017, p. 209).

Norms and Rules

Team dynamics are governed by norms and rules. The difference between rules and norms is that rules are explicit guidelines that govern the members' behavior. In contrast, norms are tacit behavioral guidelines that develop over time and shape social patterns of interaction (Adler et al., 2016, p. 250). These rules and norms sustain the integration of a group and its coexistence.

Roles

In a team, each member obtains a specific role. These roles may be formal, i.e., with an official function (such as sales representative or information systems manager). There may also be informal roles that do not respond to institutional designations but influence the dynamics of the group. According to Adler et al. (2016, p. 254), these informal roles can contribute to tasks (such as those who provide information, bring innovation, coordinate, provide practical analysis, assist in tasks, and evaluate effectively) and to group dynamics (such as those who harmonize, reconcile, and mediate).

Objectives

There are two types of objectives in groups: first, the group objective that originated the group; and second, the individual objectives, i.e., the personal motivations of the participants (Adler et al., 2016, p. 249). Regarding group objectives, groups can have a functional goal, for example, performing a task that in the workplace represents the common goal of a team. Groups can also have a social goal, for example sharing something. Both goals are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, social goals are important motivating factors for achieving functional goals. On the other hand, individual goals are based on individual interests of group members. These personal objectives can enrich the group dynamic; for example, a member can bring specific enthusiasm, knowledge, or connections to the group. Or they can negatively influence the group dynamic, for example, when they appear as a hidden selfish agenda which aims at a personal benefit without considering the costs to the group.

Three Aspects of Team Communication

Communication helps to keep the three founding pillars of the team (objectives, norm and rules, and roles) alive in the day-to-day dynamics. Therefore, communication in teams is not restricted to giving instructions or reviewing assignments. The management of team interaction involves communication about three processes that frame relationships. (Friedrich & Ulber, 2017, p. 224).

Cognitive processes

Cognitive
A conscious activity related to knowledge and information processing.

This point implies that the group must have clarity and understanding of what to do and how to do it. **Cognitive** processes involve the declarative knowledge and information that group members must have to align with a common goal and interact smoothly in fulfilling their roles. The rule of an effective team is the following: the more knowledge, the better the performance. A larger knowledge base allows members to reflect and integrate viewpoints better and to create and contribute better ideas. (Ruck, 2019, p. 62). Knowledge also defines the learning capacity of a group because it allows for the conceptualization and evaluation of processes and their outcomes.

Through communication, the necessary information and knowledge is shared. According to Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006), four types of knowledge influence team effectiveness (cited in Friedrich & Ulber, 2017, p. 225):

- knowledge about the task, expected results, goals, role performance, and possible difficulties. This allows the group to have a mental picture of the task.
- knowledge about the team, its members, available resources, diversity of perspectives, and roles. This allows for a mental picture of the team structure.
- knowledge of the team members, personal characteristics, values, expectations, and habits. This allows the members to know about the diversity in their team and provides them with a mental image of each team member and the connections between members.
- knowledge of the team's operational processes. This makes it possible to know the best ways to perform a task. This allows for effective team cooperation.

Emotional processes

Groups are composed of humans; this inevitably implies the presence of emotions. Emotions define the quality of responses in people (Manucci, 2016, p. 69). They characterize the quality of relationships, collaboration, and trust between people. The team may have a high technical level and each member can individually have a high level of technical skill. However, if the emotional climate of the group is negative, the achieved result will be insufficient. For example, a work team may have a high level of knowledge about a field and vast experience; but, if suspicion, mistrust, and egoism prevail, this emotional framework will become an obstacle to delivering information, sharing results, and providing personal experiences transparently. In the same way, emotional predisposition influences the cognitive processes, because people are either willing or reluctant to incorporate new knowledge and accept novelties depending on their emotional state (Truxillo et al., 2021, p. 341).

Regarding the impact of emotions on a team, trust is one of the most significant factors. Trust is the core of efficient teamwork. It enables cooperation, mutual support, solidarity, and the possibility of accepting and correcting mistakes. This emotional framework of trust strengthens the sense of belonging to a group and commitment to its objectives (Truxillo et al., 2021 p. 512).

The fundamental difference between an effective team and a less effective group is the degree of psychological safety felt by its members. Psychological safety is the perception of the negative or positive consequences of taking interpersonal risks in the workplace. The more secure the individuals feel, the more willing they are to share their ideas and cooperate (Truxillo et al., 2021, p. 513). Trust and cohesion influence the motivational states, that increase team performance and creativity in solving challenges (Barsade & Gibson, 2007, p. 37). Behavioral signs of trust imply that people behave as stipulated, fulfill what they promised, and do not change their convictions or values in different situations (Horsager, 2012, p. 23).

Behavioral processes

One of the crucial points in team performance is habits. They are behaviors that were naturalized over time and are automatically repeated. Automatic habits are often resistant to change and constrain the team's ability to adapt to new demands and requirements. The ability to renew habits, reflect on their effectiveness, and to acquire new competences are key to effective performance. Communication plays a crucial role in renewing habits because through communicating, people can become aware of the habits they were unaware of (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016, p. 103). People can express the motivations, interests, and fears that form their behaviors. These manifestations make it possible to understand which invisible aspects (beliefs, biases, prejudices) affect their performance (behavior with visible results). Communication helps to think, reflect, redefine, and coordinate habit transformation towards a better team performance (Truxillo et al., 2021, p. 405). In this sense, effective teams continuously evaluate habitual routines to identify what impedes their performance (Friedrich & Ulber, 2017, p. 228).

Leadership and Communication

Leadership is enacted through communication. To lead a group, motivate its members, and support their performance, leaders constantly use communication in three directions depicted above: They must use downward communication to guide, command, and drive; they must use upward communication to listen, generate participation, and expand decisions; and they must use horizontal communication to support, accompany people, and instruct. Using the three communication directions allows the leader to create conditions to nurture the group's relationships and achieve the proposed objectives.

Many definitions of leadership address the characteristics necessary to assume this position and include cognitive and intellectual factors as well as emotional and social skills (Goleman et al., 2013, p. 63). Although there are common factors in the personal traits of leaders, the idea of having an ideal leader type is not appropriate. Successful leadership does not only depend on the characteristics of the leader but also on contextual factors (Miller, 2012, p. 189). Thus, leadership effectiveness is based on personal characteristics and the leader's ability to deal with the demands and requirements of the situation.

From the organizational perspective, Strategic Direction magazine (2014, p. 25) states that the main tasks of leaders are to shape strategy, execute decisions, manage talent, and develop future talent. "Leadership is a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move it toward accomplishing its task" (Communication , 2016, p. 678). This definition is interesting because it separates leadership traits from the person who exercises the leadership role. For example, a person may be formally recognized as a group leader (because they have been assigned) but not possess the leadership capabilities. On the other hand, there are people in a group who can be influential emergent leaders without being the formal leaders of the group.

In this sense, leadership models, that provide new perspectives on the role, consider leadership as a communication and relationship-building process (Varney, 2021, p. 23). In this framework, Miller (2012) distinguishes between transactional and transformational leaders (p. 190).

Transactional leadership

This type of leadership is based on an exchange between leaders and followers. It is generally a functional relationship of convenience or mutual favors. For instance, a transactional leader uses promises to generate a behavior, such as an increase in payment for longer working hours or a guarantee of institutional reform in exchange for a vote. Transactional leadership is more focused on obtaining immediate benefits in the present, which does not always generate fruitful conditions for the development of people (Thapa & Parimoo, 2022, p. 64). Transactional leadership is more related to power manipulation than to group development. Transactional leaders manipulate objectives through the exchange of benefits with members. In this case, there may be people who occupy formal leadership roles but only aim to manipulate and exercise power for personal benefits or status (Communication, 2016, p. 679).

Transformational leadership

This is based on a communicative relationship that provides people with the necessary conditions to develop and reach their full potential. In this aspect, the value of leadership lies in the mutual growth generated by the bond, not in the exchange of benefits. This means that a leader's relationship with people becomes a relationship in which both parties find opportunities to develop their projects and interests (Adler et al., 2016, p. 260). Transformational leadership model, concrete messages, and the leader's behaviors and attitudes communicate trust and credibility. Finally, transformational leadership creates a strong identification with the leader and the vision to achieve a better future together (Laila et al., 2022, p. 219).

In this framework, leadership communication has task, procedural, and relational functions (Communication, 2016, p. 682). The first area relates to the leader's ability to explore, enrich, summarize, share, and evaluate group ideas that enable better task performance. The second area is related to guiding the group to carry out the tasks, which is manifested in establishing objectives, assigning roles, distributing appropriate information, negotiations, and consensus. The third area of competencies is related to managing the participation and inclusion of group members, defining the rules of coexistence, resolving internal conflicts, increasing motivation, and strengthening the group spirit.

5.3 Organizational Communication

New social demands require the transformation of organizational communication processes. In the same way, new leadership needs new ways of approaching internal and external relations appeared. The first transmissive communication models, which emerged in the middle of the 20th century, were insufficient to address the complexity of social contexts by the end of the same century (Wolstenholme, 2013, p. 13).

With the development of modern societies and the social transformation of relationships, organizations discovered that these information transmission models were insufficient for attracting people to the organization. They realized that people do not choose an organization based simply on the content of delivered messages. Rather, the recipients choose, i.e., they buy, invest, and participate based on their interpretation of the received messages (Beger, 2018, p. 507).

In addition to messages from organizations, people receive messages from other sources (media, colleagues, social networks, and institutions). These messages may or may not be in sync with organizational messages. Therefore, people must create their own interpretation of organizational messages to make decisions. At this point, the credibility of the organizational message, the trust in organizational relations, and the level of influence of extra-organizational messages (from social networks, the media, and peers) will be critical to the version that supports personal decisions.

Moreover, the organization does not only communicate by explicit messages to the public but also by its mere presence. Beyond what it says through different media (in a planned and controlled way), it communicates with everything that it does (Manucci, 2008, p. 15). Thus, the social valuation of an organization is the result of its participation in society and is defined by its daily interaction with different audiences.

These links need to be managed strategically to create the public image the organization strives for (Manucci, 2008, p. 59). Organizational communication has also been called corporate communication, which refers to the organization as a “corpus” (Argenti, 2015, p. 62). This is a Latin word meaning wholeness. Understood in this way, organizational communication has the function of articulating operational interventions (production and management of messages) and taking care of the impact of the corporate presence in the community (Wood, 2016, p. 164). This corporate way of thinking about organizational communication involves different types of intervention that meet different audiences’ needs. They include the transparency of institutional behaviors, corporate culture, and relations with the government and other social institutions (Cornelissen, 2020, p. 60).

In acknowledging this fact, communication in organizations has developed from a transmissive tool to a strategic approach which manages relationships with key audiences, as audiences’ decisions depend on the quality of these relations (Argenti, 2015, p. 63).

Within this framework, the traditional notion of audiences as passive recipients was transformed into the concept of stakeholders as the key strategic factor for an organization’s public presence. The term “stakeholders” was introduced by the Stanford Research Institute in 1963 as the only strategic group to which an organization had to respond (Bonnafous-Boucher & Rendtorff, 2016, p. 10). Thus, stakeholders were initially defined as “those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist” (Freeman et al., 2010, p. 31). Edward Freeman (1984, p. 6) provided the modern definition of stakeholders, describing it as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s purpose and objectives”. His paper emphasized that the perception and valuation of individuals or social groups define and affect the organization and are thus of utmost importance (Cornelissen, 2020, p. 97).

Dimensions of Corporate Communication

It is important to differentiate corporate communication from communication tools such as advertising, public relations, or current social networks. It is a management function that comprises designing strategic guidelines for interventions and coordinating actions from different specialized disciplines such as media relations, public affairs, and internal communication (Cornelissen, 2020, p. 31). It contains three communication dimensions (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 14):

Management communications

This dimension involves communications with political and institutional significance. It also involves the highest management level and is aimed at both internal and external audiences. It is referred to today as "public affairs" or "institutional communication." Its activities include communication done by the president or CEO, presentations given by managers whose objectives are internal and external, public presentations, alliances, lobbying actions, and relations with investors and the government.

Marketing communications

This dimension is aimed at selling or promoting products or services. In the case of a company, it involves advertising, social media management, marketing strategies, sponsorship, design, and market research. In the case of nonprofit organizations, it includes activities for the dissemination of projects and is called "public communication."

Organizational communications

This dimension involves other areas of communication and has purposes and audiences that are not covered by the other two dimensions. For example this includes internal communication, community relations, sponsorship activities, or corporate advertising.

Table 4: Dimensions of Corporate Communication

Dimension	Objective	Processes
Management communications	**Strategic level** Articulation of relationships with key reputational stakeholders	• Financial information • Institutional relations • Specialized press • Special meetings • Lobbyism • Alliance • Sponsorship
Marketing communications	**Products/services** Specific campaigns to launch, promote and reinforce the positioning of products and services	• Advertising campaign • Marketing campaign • Outdoor activities • Internet • Social media • Social events

Dimension	Objective	Processes
Organizational communications	**General community** Management of the image of the organization in different audiences	• Intranet • Corporate culture management • Community activities • Social campaigns • Human resources • Training programs • Social responsibility • Corporate advertising

Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on Van Riel & Fombrun (2007).

Corporate communication must involve different dimensions and disperse audiences to achieve a solid and coherent presence. These dimensions demonstrate the complexity of corporate communication, which does not only imply the management of isolated messages or interventions in media but also the integrated and intertwined public image of an organization.

5.4 Communication with the Public

Public communication aims to socialize and promote a corporate proposal to sustain the value of the image and generate interest from different external stakeholders (Wood, 2016, p. 169). Through different actions, the external intervention aims to create a support network so that the public can positively perceive what an organization produces and choose, invest in, support, and buy it. The five significant external audiences are (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007; Costa, 2011; Argenti, 2015; Cornelissen, 2020)

Media Relations

Organizations need good relationships with mass media and new digital media representatives. The media is a fundamental bridge between the organization and external audiences, and it defines the audiences' social validation and decisions. Organizations must keep the media informed; they must have close relationships with journalists and social referents (e.g., social leaders, politicians, religious leaders, or important personalities as appropriate to the type of organization) to provide them with content about the organization and its activities. It is dangerous to wait for special conditions or crises before turning to the media; on the contrary, building vivid relations with public opinion makers is vital.

Marketing Communication

This aims at promoting or selling products or activities, and it includes classic advertising campaigns through mass media, new campaigns through digital media, and activities and events created specifically for promoting a product or service. In all cases, the interventions aim to persuade the audience to purchase, test, recognize, or recommend products or services offered by the organization. Generally, marketing is associated with profit companies; however, many non-profit organizations also use marketing techniques for persuasive purposes. Thus, marketing communication is not just about selling but it is, more generally, about making the organization's offer attractive.

Investor Relations

This communication action aims at a relatively small group within the external audience who provides funding for the organization's activities. For example, investors are not limited to profit companies (such as shareholders, banks, financial partners); civil organizations also have investors (e.g., individual and institutional donors), and governments are financially committed to private and governmental agencies. Good investor relations allow for the trust necessary for investors to provide the appropriate financing to sustain corporate projects. The audience needs technical information regarding the financial potential of projects.

Government Relations

This is communication with governmental representatives of departments related to the organization's activity. These relationships allow the organization to inform the government, analyze project feasibility, request authorizations or legal requirements, and maintain protocol relations as part of the usual contacts with the authorities. In some organizations, these relations are mandatory by law (companies with an impact on the environment or national security). In other cases, these relationships are built to influence decisions that may affect the organization's activities. These relations may be permanent or a response to temporary issues. In the latter case, relations with the government involve lobbying, a communication discipline that seeks to obtain certain decisions favorable to the organization from governmental bodies.

Community Relations

This type of relationship can have different objectives because the community includes different internal groups of audiences with different interests. Therefore, it is important to consider the community's valuation as an audience larger than the customers or the direct recipients of the corporate proposal. The fundamental objective is to sustain a positive **image** which enables the organization's valuation in different groups that are indirectly related to the corporate products or services.

Image
Personal interpretation of the corporate attributes or products of the organization

Table 5: Dimensions of Public Communication

Axes	Strategy	Instruments
Media relations	Maintain close relationships with traditional and digital media.	• Spokesperson • Press room • Digital information
Consumer relations	Promote the activity/product among target audiences/customers.	• Fairs and events • Advertising campaigns • Social networks

Axes	Strategy	Instruments
Investor relations	Provide economic and financial information. Provide information on new corporate projects.	• Press releases • Roadshows • Reports/Balance
Government relations	Maintain links with control agencies.	• Institutional meetings • Media interviews
Community relations	Maintain relationships with social referents.	• Contact center • Institutional relations • Event sponsorships

Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on Van Riel & Fombrun (2007); Costa (2011); Argenti (2015); Cornelissen (2020).

Public Relations and Related Disciplines

Modern public relations is a multifaceted communication practice that uses different media to establish relationships with a variety of audiences (Keller, 2020, p. 175). It focuses on the relationships with stakeholders and their needs (Wood, 2016, p. 164). Although different disciplines contribute to these corporate objectives, public relations has some special features:

Public relations differs from journalism because public relations practitioners focus on interaction while journalists provide information. Regarding marketing and advertising, many tools and skills overlap with public relations (Roberts-Bowman, 2016, p. 28). However, public relations differs in the object and objective of the interventions (Kelleher, 2020, p. 77). For instance, advertising aims to promote a particular product to a specific audience, while public relations aims to build beneficial relationships with diverse audiences. The same is true of marketing, which has a commercial or promotional objective for specific audiences. In this sense, we can say that the objectives of marketing only include commercial relationships with audiences of interest; unlike public relations whose interventions do not seek to sell or promote a product but to manage long-lasting and beneficial relationships for the organization and the audiences. The following table provides an overview.

Table 6: Organizational Disciplines Involved in Public Communication

Discipline	Objectives	Strategies
Advertising	Promotes the brand, products, and services for positioning and persuasion purposes.	A specific campaign to obtain a specific response from a specific target audience.
Marketing	Promotes specific products for marketing purposes.	Aims to achieve the purchase of goods and services.

Discipline	Objectives	Strategies
Public relations	Promotes the organization as a whole (its values, culture, mission and production) to generate an image of a responsible and beneficial actor in society.	The focus is on relationships, not on the exchange of goods and services. The audiences are varied and heterogeneous, not only the organization's usual stakeholders, but also different community actors, for example groups of young people, social activists, public transportation users, local residents, educational institutions, among others.

Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on Kelleher (2020).

SUMMARY

Communication is the essence of the interaction between people. However, communication is not a simple exchange of units of information; communication involves negotiations of meaning. In this context, communication in the workplace is fundamental because it allows the interrelation of meanings that affect organizational relationships and people's performance.

Communication at work has different dimensions, ranging from simple contact between two people to coordinate a task to massive interventions in the community to promote a product or service. In this context, the media is a tool that carries messages and must be aligned with the relationship management strategy. The most critical communication factor at work is sustaining positive relationships with stakeholders (both internal and external). Therefore, the status of relationships with different audiences is an essential dimension in planning the various forms of message content delivery.

Within this framework, communication at work not only provides units of information for coordinating tasks or selling products but also makes it possible to create a framework of meaning for relationships. This is important for internal coexistence and the management of external relationships that defines the social value of an organization.

UNIT 6

CONVERSATION STRATEGIES

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

- explain how conversations shape relationships.
- elaborate on the functions of self-disclosure.
- name the principles of effective content presentation.
- describe strategies to employ influence.
- depict how to plan and structure conversations.
- discuss how to facilitate problem solving in groups.

6. CONVERSATION STRATEGIES

Introduction

In this chapter we explore how to facilitate and manage conversations competently. To structure our exploration, we will use the Square of Communication introduced by Schulz von Thun (2008, p. 14). It describes how each statement contains the four messages of factual content, self-disclosure, relationship, and appeal. For example, if the colleague you share the office with says “Autumn arrived suddenly, and it is cold. Could you close the window?”, she is informing on the factual content side about a season-related drop in temperature. She discloses that she is feeling cold. Her relationship message implies that you relate to each other in such a way that small favors (getting up and closing the window for her) can be asked, and she appeals to you to close the window.

These four aspects are not only present in each statement but also in each conversation. We can use these four perspectives to analyze the contribution of one speaker to a conversation (see the graphic below): Which facts does the speaker contribute with the “objective-content beak?” Does the speaker master the challenge of being factually comprehensible? What does the speaker reveal about themselves with the “self-disclosure beak”? Is the speaker accessible as a person? What does the speaker transmit with the “relationship beak” , and how does the speaker think about the listeners and relate to them ? Does the speaker reach the listeners personally? What does the “appeal beak” convey regarding what the speaker wants the interlocutor to do and does the speaker make themselves clear about it?

Figure 20: Four Aspects in a Conversation

Content	Challenge
“Objective-content-beak”: The facts I contribute	• to be factually comprehensible
“Self-disclosure-beak”: What I reveal about myself	• to be accessible as a person
“Relationship-beak”: What I think about you How I relate to you	• to reach the listener(s)
“Appeal-beak”: What I want (you to do)	• to make clear what I want (you to do)

Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Schulz von Thun (2008, pp. 9–18).

Rather than just letting communication happen on these four levels, we can use the communication square as a tool to intentionally plan and manage conversations. We will look into the way we can shape relationships, handle self-disclosure, present content, and employ influence. On these grounds, we will then unfold the way we can plan a conversation and structure it during its course. The context we are looking at is mostly interpersonal communication happening in dyads, i.e., between two people. In the last section, however, we will focus on groups and how to facilitate their problem solving.

6.1 Shaping Relationships

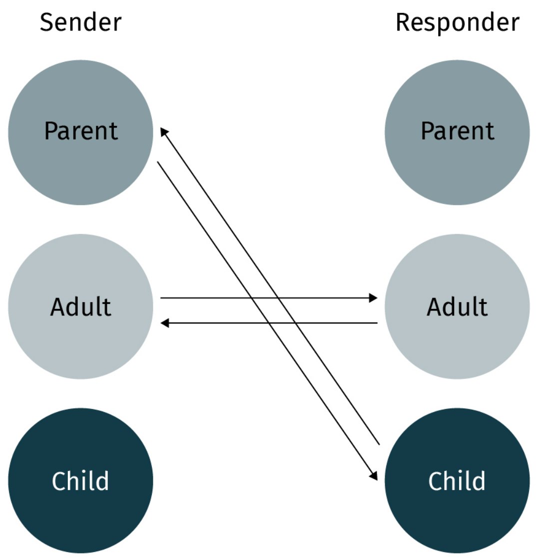
Through communication, people create connections with each other and develop relationships (Haunani Solomon & Vangelisti, 2014, p. 347). Communication competence is not only essential for developing, but also maintaining healthy relationships (Afifi & Coveleski, 2015, p. 317).

Relational Messages

The relational message of a statement informs about the quality of the relationship between two communication partners. It is characterized by affinity, immediacy, respect, and control. Affinity is the degree to which people appreciate and are attracted to each other. Immediacy is the communicated level of closeness or attachment. Respect is the degree to which we admire others and hold them in esteem (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 198–199). In every relationship, there is distribution of control, which is the amount of influence the communicators seek. Control can be distributed evenly, or one relational partner can have more control and the other(s) less. An uneven distribution of control is unproblematic unless people disagree on the distribution of control among themselves (Adler et al., 2017, p. 199).

As long as the relational messages we receive match our beliefs about the appropriate amount of affinity, immediacy, respect, and control for the respective relationship, we aren't aware of them (Adler et al., 2017, p. 199). In such cases Transactional Analysis (TA) would speak of a complementary transaction: Senders address us in the ego-state that we accept, and in our response we address them in the ego-state they were sending from (see the graphic below). Such parallel transactions can perpetuate indefinitely. The three major ego-states according to TA are parent, child, and adult. The parent ego state is influenced by the rules and laws of our childhood. If we are in this state, we will either behave from a critical judgmental perspective or a sympathetic and supportive perspective. In the child ego state, our actions are either driven by spontaneous impulses or adapted to the behaviors we feel the others expect from us. In the adult ego state, we act as rational thinkers. If we react from a different ego-state that we are addressed in, the transaction will be crossed and communication will be disturbed. For instance, a superior may tell an employee to finish a report before lunch break. If the employee replies: “Alright, I will send it to you before twelve.”, the transactions will be complementary and they flow in parallel from adult to child and back, as the employee accepts the relationship message that the supervisor is in control of allocating their work time.

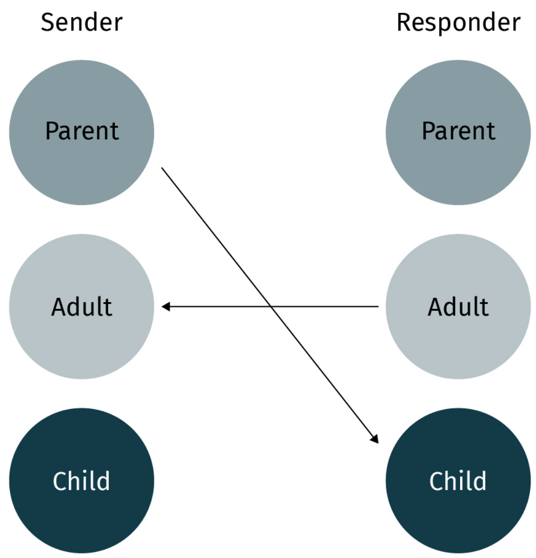
Figure 21: Complementary Transactions



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Harris (2004).

A crossed transaction (see the graphic below) will occur if the employee says: “I have scheduled to work on the sales-strategy presentation till lunchtime, but I can work on the report in the afternoon.” Here the employee does not accept the superior as being in control of their time. The superior can accept this new relationship definition and start a negotiation about time allocation from adult to adult or react in the “crossed” way and say: “I am the one in charge of this department and I expect the report by twelve.” to regain control (Harris, 2004).

Figure 22: A Crossed Interaction



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Harris (2004).

Communication Climate

The overall tendency of the relationship messages creates the communication climate of a relationship. It is the emotional tone of a relationship carried by the messages that the partners send and receive (Adler et al., 2017, p. 216). The communication climate can be sunny and friendly, be cold and hostile, change quickly, or be rather stable. The communication climate is a function of the way people feel about one another. It influences on the way people will respond whenever irritation or conflict emerges in a relationship (Adler et al., 2017, p. 218).

The communication climate is determined by the degree to which people feel valued (Adler et al., 2017, p. 218). Confirming messages show (with words and actions) our respect for interlocutors and their importance to us (Adler et al., 2017, p. 218). In confirming messages, we depict our recognition of the others and our interest in them, acknowledge the others' thoughts and feelings, and show endorsement by agreeing with (parts of) what the other person has said (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 218–219).

The opposite are disconfirming messages expressed by words and actions that convey a lack of care and respect for the others and deny their value (Adler et al., 2017, p. 219). Disconfirmation is expressed, for instance, in criticism that is encompassing and personal, or in contempt that ridicules or belittles others. Defensiveness is another expression of disconfirmation, where partners protect themselves by counterattacking or stonewalling; by doing so, the partners refuse to engage with each other (Adler et al., 2017, p. 220).

The use of directives, as means of control, also shapes the climate in relationships. Directives range from rather polite questions or requests to more forceful commands or insistence on controlling the others. A directive communication style creates a closed communication climate in which people are less trusting and willing to communicate. Non-directive verbal communication is characterized by empathy and respect and creates an open climate that encourages collaboration and information exchange. (Communication, 2016, p. 119)

The communication climate develops in relational spirals. This is a reciprocal communication pattern in which one's message reinforces the other's message (Adler et al., 2017, p. 221). If a confirming message is followed by a positive reaction, a positive spiral will be created. Negative spirals are comprised of disconfirming messages that reinforce each other and can develop into negative escalatory spirals. They then result in an exchange of verbal attacks that gets worse and worse.

Meta-communication
In this we communicate about how we communicate.

Avoidance spirals, in which partners slowly withdraw and invest less and less in the relationship, can be equally destructive (Adler et al., 2017, p. 222). Switching from disconfirming to confirming messages can interrupt the negative spiral; as can the employment of appropriate communication techniques. For example, one interlocutor may use **meta-communication** and say, "hold on, we will not solve the problem this way, let's reschedule the discussion," or a non-judgmental I-language can be used: Rather than saying, "you don't understand the problem," one could say, "when you do not mention the effects this will have on our working schedule, I get the impression that you do not consider all the relevant factors." Both techniques can positively influence the communication climate. If negative spirals escalate, they may bring relationships to an end (Adler et al., 2017, p. 222).

Forming Relationships

Prioritizing relational goals by engaging in relationship-maintenance communication, such as putting our partner's needs before our own's, celebrating accomplishments or milestones of our relationship, spending quality time together, and checking in on one another (Communication, 2016, p. 277) can strengthen relationships and create a positive communication climate. In such instances, meta-communication can be used to initiate a conversation "about the way we see and treat each other in our relationship." This sometimes leads to a "defining-the-relationship talk," in which we talk about our relationship status. For instance, are we "more than just friends" (i.e., romantic partners) or "better just friends" (i.e., no more partners in romance) ; (Communication, 2016, p. 272)?

Communicative encounters that make the state of the relationship an explicit topic occur rather rarely. Generally, relationships are based on the implicit schemata that are prevalent in our society and culture. Moreover, we shape our relationships and their unique culture implicitly through storytelling, idioms, routines and rituals, and rules and norms. In the forming state of relationships, we share our story to see if our potential relational partners can "relate" to them and are compatible with us. Later we tell stories about our shared experiences and make, for instance, the storyline of a "happy marriage" to create a sense of solidarity and belonging in established relationships. Hence, relationships are formed in communication, and they also create their unique form of communication. For example, personal idioms such as nicknames are unfamiliar to outsiders, but they create cohesiveness and solidarity inside our relationships.

Moreover, the routines and rituals that are characteristics of our relationships, contribute to the establishment of a unique relational culture and bring comfort and predictability to it. Examples are a routinely family dinner to catch up on everyone's day or the company's annual Christmas or New Year's party. Relationship rules and norms inform about what should and should not be done in certain contexts and help the relationships to function smoothly. For instance, the coworkers going out together on a Friday night for the happy hour can agree not to "talk shop," that is not to talk about work-related topics (Communication, 2016, p. 285).

Theories

Different theories explain how and why relationships are formed. The stages in which relationship partners come together are initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. The coming apart of relationships happens in the stages of differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating (Communication, 2016, p. 330).

Social Exchange Theory highlights the way perceptions or experiences of rewards and costs drive interpersonal communication, relationship satisfaction, and commitment or stability (Haunani Solomon & Vangelisti, 2014, p. 347). This semi-economic model suggests that we relate to others because the rewards are higher than the investment costs of the relationship. Rewards may be either material, for instance access to money, or non-material such as prestige, emotional support, or end of loneliness. Costs include a sense of obligation, emotional pain, or granting favors. The (usually unconscious) weighing of costs and rewards in a relationship affects commitment and relational satisfaction (Adler, 2017, p. 187; Communication, 2016, p. 330).

Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) is based on the presumption that all human beings long to feel secure, loved, and supported. Depending on how much the primary caregivers are available and how responsive they are to these needs, children develop different attachments. Later in life, these attachments shape the way individuals communicate in close relationships. Individuals with secure attachments tend to be moderately expressive and socially supportive, emotionally stable, and can give and receive affection freely. Anxiously-resistant-attached individuals tend to be more negative in conflicts and express negative emotions more. People with an avoidant attachment pattern tend to be emotionally reserved in order to avoid conflict and emotional intimacy. Although attachments can change, they remain relatively consistent across the lifespan (Afifi & Coveleski, 2015, pp. 323–324).

Affection Exchange Theory (Floyd, 2001) suggests that the more people give and receive affection and express immediacy and social support, the better their organisms can adapt to acute and chronic stress. Affectionate communication conveys closeness and security, which protects people from the negative health effects of stress and promotes better health (Afifi & Coveleski, 2015, p. 325).

The theories of self-disclosure, which we investigate next, also explain how relationships are formed.

6.2 Handling Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure encompasses both deliberate self-presentation and unintentional self-revelation. It is the verbal and nonverbal communication of significant personal information that was previously unknown to the receiver (Adler et al., 2017, p. 200; Hargie, 2017, p. 235). As we explore the dynamics of self-disclosure, we will learn that effective self-disclosure is a balancing act in each relationship (Adler et al., 2017, p. 203). In order to balance it well, we must demonstrate self-disclosure flexibility and vary the depth and breadth of our disclosures appropriately across situations (Hargie, 2017, p. 264).

Theories of Self-Disclosure

Different theories explain why and how we self-disclose. Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) states that for a relationship to develop, we engage in a reciprocal process of self-disclosure. The broader and deeper we self-disclose, the more intimate the relationship becomes. Breadth represents the range of topics discussed and depth refers to how personal or sensitive the information is. According to this theory, people gradually move from casualty to intimacy over time, similar to peeling the layers from an onion (Adler, 2017, p. 201; Communication, 2016, p. 314).

Rather than assuming a linear progress, relational dialectic theories argue that relationships evolve in cycles. In the strive to achieve a system of shared meanings between the partners, these cycles are marked by turning points. Such events are meaningful for the level of intimacy and self-disclosure (Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 218). The level may rise or fall due to dialectic tensions in relationships: Privacy regulation refers to the tension between openness and closeness and the strategic employment of self-disclosure. On the one hand, humans want to be open and allow for intimacy by self-disclosing; on the other hand, they also want to maintain a degree of privacy (Communication, 2016, p. 315; Tardy & Smithson, 2018, pp. 218–219). Another tension is the connection versus autonomy dialectic that is present in interpersonal relationships: Usually, one partner has a greater need for closeness and connection while the other partner wants more distance, autonomy, and independence. These different needs become apparent in the degree of self-disclosure employed by the partners (Adler, 2017, p. 204).

Moreover, we engage in self-disclosure to compare ourselves to others. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) states that we engage in two types of comparisons to evaluate ourselves. First, we determine whether we are superior or inferior to others on dimensions such as attractiveness, popularity, or intelligence and then we may disclose information about our intellectual aptitude or athletic abilities. Second, we evaluate whether we are the same as or different from others by disclosing our beliefs or values. Disclosures about us as a person can also lead to self-validation if the listener confirms our self-concept. When we disclose our fantasies or thoughts to others, we can check if they are acceptable or unacceptable. We can engage in social comparison as the discloser or the receiver of disclosures; this may allow us to determine whether we are interested in pursuing a relationship with another person (Communication, 2016, p. 315; Hargie, 2017, p. 252).

The Johari window, which is named after its creators Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, describes the relationship between self-disclosure and self-awareness (Adler et al., 2017, p. 210). The window contains all information about the self and consists of the four quadrants of open, hidden, blind, and unknown information. Open information is known to self and to others; hidden information is known to self but not to others; blind information is not known to self but to others; and unknown information is neither known to self nor to others (Adler et al., 2018, p. 202; Communication, 2016, p. 315; Hargie, 2017, p. 251). With intentional self-disclosure, we aim to transform hidden information into open information; for instance, revealing our experience in a thematic field to the team leader who makes us a suitable candidate for an upcoming project. Regarding the blind area, you might not be aware that your teammates consider you as the (unofficial) leader. Inviting feedback from others can help us learn more about our blind area and to foster our self-awareness (Communication, 2016, p. 316).

Table 7: Johari-Window

Information	**Known to me**	**Unknown to me**
Known to others	Open	Blind
Unknown to others	Hidden	Unknown

Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022).

Self-Disclosure Content

The content of self-disclosure falls into the main categories of observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (Hargie, 2017, pp. 235–236). At the beginning of a relationship, we usually disclose observations and thoughts before we share deeper feelings and needs as they make the discloser more vulnerable (Hargie, 2017, p. 237). Valence is the degree to which the disclosure contains positive or negative content. In the early stages of relationship development, disclosures are mainly positive things about the discloser or the listener. Negative self-disclosures usually only emerge once a relationship has been established. They are comparatively rare but have more informative power as they are more unexpected (Hargie, 2017, p. 239).

Factors Influencing Self-Disclosure

Contextual, personal, and cultural factors influence the degree of self-disclosure. A warm environment with soft seats and gentle lighting can encourage self-disclosure, as does a smaller group size and a medium spatial distance between conversation partners (Hargie, 2017, pp. 265–266). Specific circumstances can lead to a rapid increase in self-disclosure, such as a crisis or meeting a stranger whom we are not likely to see again or sharing social networks with (Hargie, 2017, p. 267; Communication, 2016, p. 317).

Research shows that computer-mediated communication (CMC) can foster self-disclosure, especially in shy individuals and in visually anonymous settings. In CMC, intimacy is experienced as less threatening than in face-to-face interactions (Hargie, 2017, p. 266; Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 220). Moreover, personal factors influence the degree of self-disclosure. Some individuals have a personal tendency towards transparency and self-disclosure while others hesitate to reveal personal information. Regarding cultural influences, US-Americans have been found to disclose more than the people in Japan, Germany, the UK, and the Middle East (Hargie, 2017, p. 262). Within cultures, there is a societal trend towards more self-disclosure motivated by self-disclosing protagonists in reality TV shows and social media (Communication, 2016, p. 318).

Reasons for Self-Disclosure

The reason we self-disclose or not can be self-focused, other-focused, interpersonal, and situational. Self-focused reasons for self-disclosure can include self-presentation or self-clarification, expressing emotions and achieving relief, or seeking support. Self-focused reasons for not disclosing are the fear of rejection, embarrassment, or losing privacy (Communication, 2016, p. 310; Hardie, 2017, p. 251; Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 219). Disclosing stigmatizing information bears the risk of losing control over the information and receiving negative evaluations from others.

Considering the other-focused reasons, we may decide to disclose as we feel responsible to inform or educate others and to share experiences. If we doubt whether the other person will protect the information or not, we may decide not to self-disclose (Communication, 2016, p. 318; Hargie, 2017, p. 248).

Interpersonal reasons for disclosure involve the wish to build or to maintain a trusting and intimate relationship (Communication, 2016, p. 318). Self-disclosure serves important functions in relationship initiation, development, maintenance, and even dissolution. Mutual self-disclosure establishes connections, can increase affinity and trust, and shapes our identities (Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 218). It is also associated with feelings of acceptance and attraction. These feelings are of particular relevance at the beginning of relationships, but self-disclosure is also crucial for relationship maintenance. It is associated with relationship satisfaction, which predicts relationship stability and longevity (Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 221).

Couples often use the strategy of debriefing, i.e., they disclose to each other about the periods of time they did not spend together. Relationship-focused disclosure such as public declarations of commitment on social media can also contribute to relationship maintenance (Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 222). Alternatively, self-disclosing relationship harming content, such as infidelity or disinterest in the relationship, can lead to the dissolution of a relationship (Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 223). Likewise, we'll limit self-disclosure if we want to restrict relationship development, or if we fear to lose the relationship or consider the information irrelevant to the particular relationship. Withholding self-disclosure can destroy trust (Communication, 2016, p. 318; Tardy & Smithson, 2018, pp. 218–219). Sometimes situational reasons, such as lack of time or lack of a suitable and protected place to talk, impede self-disclosing (Communication, 2016, p. 318).

Self-Disclosure Process

The process of self-disclosure is reciprocal and circular in nature: An individual self-discloses, the recipient reacts with more self-disclosure, then the first discloser responses with even more self-disclosure. Due to this reciprocity, self-disclosure is more effective in gaining information than asking for disclosures (Tardy & Smithson, 2018, p. 225). However, this dynamic can lead to unplanned self-disclosure. One may disclose some personal information which triggers you to reciprocate disclosure. In such instances, you may not think through the potential risks and not manage your privacy well (Communication, 2016, p. 319).

Consequences of Self-Disclosure

If the cycle of disclosure develops positively, a greater sense of relational intimacy and affection, a heightened self-worth, reduced stress, increased feelings of social support, and positive effects on physical health may emerge (Communication, 2016, p. 320). Conversely, negative consequences of self-disclosure can be embarrassment and lower self-esteem (Communication, 2016, p. 314). In addition, we should self-disclose carefully as we may lose control over disclosed information. A research study has found that 77 percent of office workers who received a disclosure and were asked not to mention it to anyone else, told at least two other people by the end of the day. The reported reasons were receiving attention for having inside information or demonstrating their power or connection (Hargie, 2017, pp. 253–254).

Mindful Self-Disclosure

To evaluate whether self-disclosing is beneficial, these seven questions can be helpful (Adler et al., 2017, p. 202):

1. Is the other person important to you and do you want to develop a more personal relationship?
2. Is the disclosure content situationally appropriate? Does the topic fit into the conversation? If you are unfamiliar with the person and the situation, be rather cautious, as cultural and personal background highly influence the perceived appropriateness. In China, for example, it is appropriate to talk with adult strangers about their age and income, but not in Germany.
3. Is the risk of disclosing reasonable? Does your interlocutor seem to be trustworthy and supportive?
4. Is the disclosure reciprocated? Unequal self-disclosure creates an unbalanced relationship. To avoid imbalance, make cautious steps in self-disclosure and see if your interlocutor follows.
5. Does the disclosure match the current relationship climate? Remember that the level of intimacy rises and falls in cycles in established relationships.
6. Will the effect of the disclosure be constructive? Is the information necessary or helpful for your interlocutor?
7. Is the self-disclosure clear and understandable? Are you internally clear regarding your self-disclosure? Self-disclosing can foster self-clarification, but this kind of self-exploration should be reserved to save relationships.

6.3 Presenting Content

Topics and facts are usually the most obvious aspect of communication. We communicate information about the discussed subject with the objective content message. These factual statements can be true or false and comprehensible or incomprehensible (Adler et al., 2017, p. 112; p. 198). If our primary goal is to present information, we usually inform about a non-controversial topic and the purpose of our communication is to increase the listeners' knowledge and/or ability rather than to persuade them and change their attitudes (Adler et al., 2017, p. 354). This can take place in small groups or with a public speech, but often we inform others one-on-one. The intended learning outcomes, which you can find at the beginning of each unit in this textbook, are examples of informative purpose statements. As human perception has to overcome many limitations and barriers, we should make the information processing as easy as possible. The following principles can support our listeners' understanding and knowledge growth:

Prepare Your Content Well

After you have clarified the purpose of your communication, research your topic well, collect objective facts from trustworthy resources, and include novel information and relevant examples. Inform your audience through the four methods of definition, description, instruction, and explanation (Adler et al. 2017, pp. 352–353; Communication, 2016, p. 549). Definition entails defining concepts clearly and concisely. One can use synonyms and antonyms (words with similar or opposite meanings), or identify the use or function of the subject. Moreover, we can use representative examples for our subject or provide the etymology or history of a word (Communication, 2016, pp. 535–537). Descriptions are detailed verbal pictures of the essential factors of your subject. Instructions are verbal directions of how to do something and can be accompanied by physical demonstrations of the steps. Explanations entail deeper knowledge of how something works, or details about the background and history of the subject (Adler et al. 2017, pp. 352–353; Communication, 2016, p. 549).

Limit the Amount of Information

Information overload happens when too much information is provided, and the recipients have trouble sorting and organizing it. Sorting information is the prerequisite to make sense of it and to transform it into understanding or knowledge. Dealing with too much information can also lead to the psychological stress called information anxiety (Adler et al., 2017, p. 351). To help avoid information overload, we should reduce our content to three to five main ideas (Adler et al., 2017, p. 356; Communication, 2016, p. 542) and use **chunking** to present a desirable amount of information. If we want our audience to remember our content well, we should allocate only 30 percent of our talk to introducing new materials and 70 percent to repackaging the information. Simply repeating the content might bore the listeners; but repackaging, by using examples and elaborations, will help them to remember the key points (Communication 2016, p. 550).

Chunking
This refers to the size and abstraction level of information.

Build on Familiar and Simple Knowledge

If you want to write or talk about an unfamiliar topic, associate it with a familiar one to build knowledge. For instance, if you are going to explain how the stock market works, you can compare it to the tasks of a salesclerk in a retail store; or if you are introducing the Chinese New Year festival to a Western audience, you can compare it to Christmas and highlight their similarities and differences. Moreover, you can build knowledge by presenting simple information first and then introducing more complex information gradually (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 355–356). This step requires the prior assessment of what listeners have already known (Hargie, 2017, p. 211).

Be as Comprehensible as Possible

Comprehensibility is related to the way information is presented. If we present it orally, we should aim to articulate our words clearly and speak at a normal pace and loud enough to be heard well. Furthermore, we can follow the four comprehensibility connectors, which were researched with written texts, or apply oral presentations. In their research into comprehensibility, Schulz von Thun and colleagues discovered that comprehensible texts differ from incomprehensible texts on four dimensions:

1. **Simplicity versus complexity**: Simple texts consist of short sentences with a plain structure, and they do not use or explain technical terms. Complex texts use long and complex sentences, many technical and abstract terms, and unfamiliar phrases.
2. **Arrangement/Order versus poor structure and disorder**: Well-structured texts have an inner consistency and follow a clear logic order. They are arranged in an orderly fashion and use paragraphs, headings, bold print, and bullet points to guide the reader. This dimension is especially relevant for longer texts. The most commonly used structure is as follows: introduction, in which the purpose of communication is stated; the body, which is structured along the key points; and the conclusion, which reviews the main points and provides a take-away message as a memory aid (Adler et al. 2017, pp. 356–357).
3. **Shortness/Precision versus verbosity**: Short texts only present the mere essence of a matter. Verbose texts describe each matter in detail and use many words to describe similar things repeatedly.
4. **Additional stimuli versus no additional stimuli**: Additional stimuli, such as visualizations in the form of charts, models or videos, direct speech, citations, questions, or humor, are used to present the content in a vivid and lively manner and to arise the interest of the recipients. If additional stimuli are not used in texts, they can appear dull and impersonal.

Whereas a tendency towards the four comprehensibility connectors of simplicity, arrangement/order, shortness/precision, and additional stimuli makes texts more comprehensible, they can also be overused. For example, texts can be so simple that their recipients feel being addressed as dumb. Outer structures might be so dominant that they can obstruct the reading flow. There may be so few words in the texts that understanding becomes difficult. Besides, too many additional stimuli can divert the actual message (Schulz von Thun, 2008, p. 42–45). Research could prove that, when texts had identical contexts but one was more comprehensible according to the ratings of the four dimensions described above, the text with the better ratings was more understandable and memorizable (Schulz von Thun, 2008, p. 52). The biggest differences between more and less comprehensible texts became visible in the research participants with lower reading skills (Schulz von Thun, 2008, p. 53). Moreover, “comprehensible” texts were rated as more interesting by research participants (Schulz von Thun, 2008, p. 54).

Involve Your Listeners

To create information hunger and rise interest, we can relate to the recipients’ individual needs; for instance, by providing practical information that is useful in everyday life (Adler et al., 2017, p. 355). We can use appropriate self-disclosure and personalize our presentation to present ourselves as a human being to connect with (Adler et al., 2017, p. 359). Moreover, we can encourage listeners to ask questions (Adler et al., 2017, p. 360).

In conclusion, we should remember that the success of a presentation is not defined by the amount of detail conveyed but by the degree of understanding achieved by the listeners (Hargie, 2017, p. 230).

6.4 Employing Influence

The appeal side of communication deals with its functional aspect. We communicate to achieve instrumental goals; we want to influence and persuade our interlocutors’ behaviors. We want them to support and help us, to provide something, or to comply with tasks (Communication Studies, 2016, p. 287).

In order to be persuasive, we need to be clear about our intentions and goals. This may sound self-evident, but often our intra-personal dialogue about an issue consists of opposing viewpoints. We have to reconcile them inside us before we can address them clearly on the outside in communication with others. Stating our wishes and desires explicitly can be an effective way to their fulfilment; for instance, we can ask someone to help us carry a bag. However, sometimes implicit appeals can reach their goal more easily, as receivers perceive a greater freedom in their reactions; for instance, when we state that a bag is heavy, our interlocutor is free to offer us help. And if the interlocutor doesn’t, we still have the chance to directly ask for help.

Another fundamental skill for being persuasive is message adaptation. It tailors our persuasive efforts to the respective situation and recipient(s) we want to influence (O’Keefe, 2018, p. 319). To effectively adapt our message, we can ask ourselves why our recipients are not already behaving in the intended manner. Common answers include:

- They don’t know or don’t think that it is a good idea and they lack positive attitudes.
- They have social considerations and suppose that other people don’t think it is a good idea.
- They think they lack the ability to perform the advocated behavior.
- They fail to transform good intentions into action.

To overcome these challenges, we need to influence the listeners' attitudes in favor of the advocated viewpoints, address social factors, change the perceived behavioral ability, and help them to convert intentions into actions (O'Keefe, 2018, pp. 319–328).

Influencing Recipients' Attitudes

To influence recipients' attitudes, we need supportive arguments, and must handle counterarguments effectively (O'Keefe, 2018, pp. 320–323). Arguments are formed around the three components of claim, evidence, and warrant. An argument claims something and supports it with evidence or ground. Evidence can stem from research or everyday experience. The warrant refers to the credibility of the evidence. A study undertaken by an established research institution has a higher warrant than personal experience (Communication, 2016, p. 551). Arguments are good reasons in favor of the persuader's viewpoint. They can be the basis of positive consequences if the advocated behavior is enacted or negative consequences if not. For example, a daily workout routine will benefit your health, but too little movement can weaken your cardiovascular systems (O'Keefe, 2018, p. 321). Arguments can be built following the three types of logical reasoning. Inductive reasoning starts from examples and draws a conclusion. To warrant a strong argument, examples should be typical, sufficient, and representative. Deductive reasoning uses established general premises and derives a specific conclusion. Premises must be true, relevant, and related to lead to a valid argument. The classical example of a deductive argument is "All humans are mortal. Socrates is a human. Socrates is mortal." The conclusion, "Socrates is mortal," is derived from the major premise, "all humans are mortal," and the minor premise, "Socrates is a human." (Communication, 2016, p. 545). Causal reasoning establishes a relationship between a cause and an effect. Often, it mistakes a correlation for a true causal relationship. (Communication, 2016, p. 567) Arguments should establish propositions in favor of our viewpoint. There are propositions of fact, value, or policy. Propositions of fact are beliefs about something existing or not. Propositions of value express that something is "good or bad," "right or wrong," or "desirable or undesirable." Propositions of policy argue that something "should or shouldn't" be done. Identifying the main proposition(s) you want to establish can help you to develop supportive arguments and organize them around your proposition (Communication, 2016, p. 556).

When dealing with counterarguments, speakers can either not mention them, mention them but not try to undermine them, or mention them and attempt to refute them. Research shows that not mentioning opposing arguments is more persuasive than mentioning but not refuting them. The most convincing case, however, is to refute them one by one (O'Keefe, 2018, p. 322). Before arguing, it is important to establish credibility via appropriate self-disclosure and to strengthen your relationship with the audience by establishing a common ground (Communication, 2016, p. 555).

Rather than the above-mentioned traditional persuasive rhetoric, which tries to win over opponents or to establish one single correct position, invitational rhetoric aims at achieving consensus through dialogue. It strives to create a safe, non-competitive climate of growth and change in which each discussion partner is acknowledged to have a valid standpoint, has the freedom to speak and to engage with alternative standpoints, and to be influenced by the discussion. Invitational rhetoric wants to contribute to the civility of communication in our society, that is capable of embracing different perspectives while still understanding our own. It encourages to acknowledge the complexity of human perspectives (Communication, 2016, p. 557).

Addressing Social Factors

Influencing social factors is directed at changing descriptive and injunctive norms. A descriptive norm is the perception of whether other people perform the advocated behavior or not. It can be influenced by providing information on how common the advocated behavior is (O'Keefe, 2018, p. 323). An injunctive norm is an individual's perception of whether the others will approve if the individual performs the advocated behavior (O'Keefe, 2018, p. 324). If individuals are informed that the others who are important to them will approve of the behavior, they are more likely to perform it (O'Keefe, 2018, p. 324). Therefore, accountability groups, for example on Facebook, work well for establishing a regular workout routine. Group members not only see the other members posting their workouts, which influences the descriptive norm, but if the members mutually like the posted workouts, their approval will also influence the injunctive norm.

Increasing Perceived Behavioral Ability

To increase perceived behavioral ability, which is also called self-efficacy, persuaders can provide necessary resources. If recipients, for example, think they cannot workout daily because the next gym is too far away, persuaders can recommend free workouts on YouTube. Moreover, examples of how to perform the advocated behavior and encouragement can enhance perceived behavioral control (O'Keefe, 2018, pp. 325–326).

Converting Intentions into Actions

To support people to convert their intentions into action, prompts and explicit planning can be supportive. Prompts serve as reminders, such as a simple sign next to the elevator that indicates the health benefits of using stairs or a bracelet that reminds us of eating mindfully. Moreover, scheduling the advocated behavior increases the probability of its performance. If we reserve an explicit time slot for our workout, it is much more likely to happen (O'Keefe, 2018, p. 327).

6.5 Planning and Structuring Conversations

So far, we have explored the four aspects of communication present in each conversation and the way we can communicate them competently. In the following section, we will focus on the process of conversations and the way to structure it well. At the workplace, we are often pressed for time and feel that we should not lose time at the beginning or end of a conversation. However, time and effort spent at the opening and closing of conversations should be regarded as a key investment towards their effectiveness (Hargie, 2017, p. 309). Hence, both phases will be our focus in the following section.

Opening Conversations

The opening of professional encounters usually progresses through the four phases of meeting, greeting, seating, and treating (Hargie, 2017, p. 272):

Meeting

At this stage, first impressions are formed based on nonverbal cues, such as the interlocutors' physical characteristics or their clothing. These initial perceptions are very influential regarding expectations, which can lead to self-fulfilling prophecy (Hargie, 2017, p. 277). This happens when person A has an expectation of person B, which influences the way person A acts towards person B, which in turn causes person B to behave in accordance with person A's expectation and makes it come true.

Greeting

It represents the social phase of welcoming others with verbal salutations and gestures such as handshakes.

Seating

During this stage, participants settle down and direct their focus towards the topic of the meeting. At this point, the goal is to ease a conversation by the induction of an appropriate set (Hargie, 2017, p. 271). Set induction is the initial strategy employed to establish a frame of reference that is deliberately designed to facilitate the development of a communicative link between the expectations of the participants and the realities of the situation. Furthermore, in this phase expectations are identified, the functions and the knowledge of the participants are outlined, and the links with any previous encounters are established. Based on this information, the relationship between the expectations of the participants and the reality of the present situation is evaluated (Hargie, 2017, p. 295).

To tackle the unique reality of a communicative situation, Schulz von Thun (2008, p. 36) has developed the Situational Model which consists of four components and related questions:

1. The entrance represents the situational history. To explore this component, we can ask what has happened before and what has led up to the current meeting or encounter: Were there prior meetings, and between whom were they held? What were the results? Who was invited for this meeting? Finally, we can inquire whether everyone agrees on this background or if important information should be added.
2. The upper part stands for the topics of the meeting. What is the headline of the meeting? What main and sub-themes need to be discussed? What should not be discussed today? Does the agenda align with the background of the meeting? Is there a hidden agenda?

3. The lower part is about the people involved, their roles and relationships. Who is present today, and in which function, in which role (represented as hats in the picture) and with which interest? Can the present people discuss the topics, or is someone with relevant knowledge or responsibility missing? Is everyone willing to discuss the listed topics?
4. The exit depicts the intended goals of the meeting. What kind of decision, agreement, or plan should emerge from this meeting? Does it make sense if this group specifically works towards these goals? Can everyone agree on working towards them?

Figure 23: The Situational Model

Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Schulz von Thun (2008, p. 39).

The situation model is useful both in the planning and structuring of a conversation or meeting. While preparing a meeting, the model helps us to take all important components of a meeting in consideration. When we reflect on the people involved, we might discover, for example, that we forgot to invite a representative from the accounting department whose knowledge about budgeting is crucial, and we can add that person to our invitees. If we are the facilitators of the meeting or conversation, we can structure our opening statement along the model to establish as much common ground between the interlocutors as possible. Rather than assuming everyone knows about the background history of the meeting, is familiar with the people present, and understands the agenda and the intended goals in a similar way, we should make these components explicit in the beginning. By doing so, we can assure that everyone is "on the same page" and the appropriate set for the meeting is induced. If discrepancies emerge, they must be clarified. Besides, the goals, nature, content, and duration of the forthcoming interaction must be finalized and agreed on before the interaction can progress fruitfully in the "treating" phase. The end of the beginning phase is marked by the time when the interaction moves on to the main body of the cognitive or substantive business to be conducted (Hargie, 2017, p. 272; 295).

Treating

In the treating or process phase, the problems or points of discussion listed on the agenda are tackled. Each discussion point should be named and then discussed. During the discussion, equal contribution of interlocutors should be encouraged. If the discussion is saturated and the relevant points are exchanged, a summary can be provided, which signals the closure of the respective discussion topic before the next topic is named and discussed.

Closing Conversations

Closure serves perceptual, cognitive, motivational, and social functions (Hargie, 2017, p. 299): Perceptual closure is used initially to signal that the interaction is about to end and to mark the final exchange. Cognitive closure procedures include the summary of the covered issues and reached agreements and the establishing of links with future meetings. Motivational closure is employed to give participants a sense of achievement and to encourage them to continue working on the covered issues. Social closure strengthens the established relational bonds and marks the termination of the encounter. Knowing these stages through which closure progresses can help facilitate the process (Hargie, 2017, p. 308).

6.6 Problem-Solving in Groups

In the workplace, groups are typically formed to solve problems. Communication and cooperation in groups is not always easy, but research shows that groups tend to produce more and better solutions to a problem than individuals working alone (Adler et al., 2017, p. 273). The quality of problem-solving is greater in groups because they combine more resources and have generally higher degrees of accuracy, commitment, and diversity (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 273–274). The pooled resources can lead to qualitatively better solutions. Besides, groups not only have more resources, but they also mobilize them better through interaction among the members.

The likelihood that more errors will be detected in groups provides a higher accuracy. Moreover, the commitment to work on and carry out solutions is higher in groups. Groups also give room to collective creativity due to their diversity (Adler et al., 2017, p. 274). Nevertheless, some problems might be solved more quickly, easily, and efficiently by individuals (Adler et al., 2017, p. 274). Only problems with the following characteristics should be solved in groups: those that go beyond the capacity of one person, contain tasks in which people depend on each other, have more than one possible solution, require the consideration of a range of perspectives and contain potential for disagreement, can lead to costly errors, and need the commitment of a group to implement the solution (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 274–276).

Group Cohesiveness

Cohesiveness
This is the degree to which people feel connected and committed to their group.

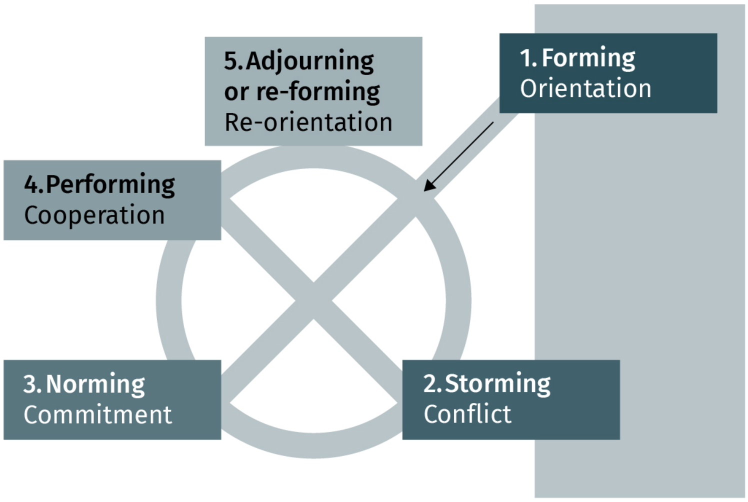
To allow for successful problem-solving, first the **cohesiveness** of the group has to be assured. In cohesive groups, relationship and work satisfaction, loyalty, innovation, and productivity are higher (Adler et al., 2017, p. 278). Focusing on common goals, recognizing the progress towards the goals, establishing shared norms and values, minimizing perceived threats and competition between the members, emphasizing the members' interdependence and threats from outside the group, the development of liking and friendship, and a shared group experience can foster cohesiveness (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 278–279).

Group cohesiveness can thus be facilitated when common goals are clearly stated, the cooperation needed towards their achievement is clear, and progress towards the goals is regularly communicated. Such task-oriented communication should be complemented by relationship-oriented communication. One way to do this is discussing group norms and values explicitly or initiating a group check-up in which the communication climate is evaluated regularly. Another way is granting opportunities for group members to get to know each other and spend time together on a more personal level.

Stages of the Group Process

Typically, cohesiveness develops gradually while groups proceed through the five stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). In the forming stage, the group starts to form and cohesiveness is created. Members aim for orientation and to become familiar with each other and their positions. Members approach each other politely and cautiously and present their own opinions to test the ground. During the storming stage, conflicts emerge and group members defend their positions and question those of others. Coalitions may form and discussions can become polarized. Though the climate of this phase may be uncomfortable to those who prefer harmony, the storming stage is necessary for healthy group development that leads to effective problem solving. In the norming stage, the group establishes norms and routines, and the members commit to the group. Hence, stability and productivity are facilitated. The group moves from conflicts towards consensus and a solution emerges. Smooth cooperation and synergy characterize the performing stage in which group members endorse and reinforce their decisions. After the group has accomplished its task, it dissolves in the adjourning phase. Ideally, this phase is supported by a guided reflection on the group journey and a celebration of its accomplishments (Adler et al., 2017, p. 280; Communication, 2016, pp. 657–661). If the group stays together and takes on new tasks, re-forming will be necessary to achieve these new goals. With re-forming, the group wheel spins anew. In general, groups may experience these stages multiple times or may not move through them in a linear fashion (Communication, 2016, p. 657).

Figure 24: Five Stages of Group Development



Source: Caroline Trautwein (2022), based on Tuckman & Jensen (1977, pp. 419–427).

Approaches to Problem-Solving

Regarding problem-solving approaches, research has clearly shown that a structured procedure produces better results than unstructured discussions (Adler et al., 2017, p. 284). Many systematic approaches to problem solving follow John Dewey's model of reflective thinking and contain the following steps (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 284–285):

1. Identify the problem and create a summarized problem statement. Also, determine the group's and individual members' goals.
2. Analyze the problem and formulate it as a broad open question. Identify the criteria for success and determine supporting and restraining forces. Gather relevant information. Try to avoid **information overload and underload** (Adler et al., 2017, p. 291).
3. Generate potential solutions. Avoid criticism and encourage an unrestricted exchange of ideas and the creation of as many solutions as possible. Nominal group technique and brainstorming can be useful methods. Combine individual ideas, if appropriate.
4. Evaluate the solutions by asking which solution is the best for solving the problem, which one is the most achievable, and which one causes the fewest negative effects. Decide on a solution.
5. Implement the solution by identifying specific tasks, determining the necessary resources, defining responsibilities, and providing for emergencies.
6. Meet to follow up on the solution, to evaluate its progress, and to revise the approach if necessary.

Information overload
This decline in efficiency occurs when the rate or complexity of material is too high to manage.

Information underload
This information shortage reduces the efficiency.

Generating Ideas

Brainstorming is an effective way to generate creative ideas and develop potential solutions. It is suggested that groups first do a warm-up brainstorming session. Then, the actual brainstorming session follows, which aims at generating a high quantity of ideas. Hence, in this step, ideas are not evaluated, but wild and new combinations of ideas are encouraged. In the next step, duplicate ideas are eliminated and the remaining ideas are clarified, organized, and evaluated (Adler et al., 2017, p. 287).

The nominal group technique allows for more equal participation in the creation of ideas. First, all members develop a list of solutions by themselves. Second, the solutions are presented one by one by each member and then collected on a chart visible to everyone. Third, everyone ranks the solutions on the list privately. Fourth, the rankings are combined to reveal the most promising solutions. Fifth, the top solutions are discussed; and finally, a decision is made (Adler et al., 2017, pp. 287–288).

Decision-Making

Common decision-making techniques include majority rule, minority rule, and consensus rule. Majority control means that a priorly defined majority, usually one-half plus one, must vote in favor of the decision. This democratic decision-making technique produces quick results, but it can also result in 49 percent of group members opposing and working against the solution. Before the decision is made, adequate time should be given to discuss different perspectives and value their owners. With minority rule, a designated authority, expert, or a minority in control makes the decision and the group members' opinions may or may not be invited and considered. When consensus is reached, all members of the group agree on the same decision. Census will be important if the decision requires high commitment of each single group member. Reaching consensus is rewarding but can be very difficult and time-consuming (Adler, 2017, pp. 289–290; Communication, 2016, p. 727)

Overcoming Challenges

Equal participation is fundamental for groups to reach their full potential. Members who do not participate actively, add nothing to the resources of the group. Consequently, their commitment to the group and the generated solutions is at stake. Hence, quiet members should be specifically encouraged to contribute. Dominance of the talkative or high-status group members should also be avoided. Virtual meetings in which the status differences are less apparentand methods such as the nominal group technique can help to overcome the challenge of unequal participation (Adler, 2017, pp. 291–293).

As we have learned, a certain degree of cohesiveness is necessary to allow the group to function well. However, in highly cohesive groups, members tend to conform to what they consider to bethe census and to self-censor their deviant thoughts. Such **groupthink** can lead to poor decision-making, as in the case of the US' Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in the 1960s or the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster in 1986 (Adler et al., 2017, p. 293).

Groupthink
A group's collective striving for unanimity that ignores critical information or alternatives to maintain the perceived consensus.

To overcome groupthink, recognize the early warning signs and scrutinize the agreement that has been achieved too quickly and easily. Moreover, respectful disagreement should be encouraged as conflict is regarded as a necessary step in the healthy development of groups. If a group tends to harmonize, it will be helpful for the designating group member(s) to play "devil's advocate" and to critically scrutinize ideas or implement the "Six Thinking Hats" method.

Six Thinking Hats is a method developed by Edward de Bono (1985) to enable group members to get out of habitual ways of thinking, to play different roles, and to see a problem from multiple perspectives. The six hats, each in a different color, represent different ways of thinking. The white hat is objective and focuses on seeking information such as data and facts, and then processes that information in a neutral way. The red hat is emotional and uses intuition to judge information and suggestions. The black hat is negative and focuses on potential risks and failures and evaluates information cautiously and defensively. The yellow hat is positive and optimistic and points out the benefits and advantages. The green hat is creative and generates new ideas and solutions and thinks "outside the box". The blue philosophical hat uses metacommunication to organize and reflect on the group communication, helps members in their respective roles, and facilitates hat switching. If the group is familiar with this method, it can also be encouraged to engage, for example in "15 minutes in black hat thinking" to overcome groupthink (Communication, 2016, pp. 719–720).

SUMMARY

Each conversation touches on the areas of relationship, self-disclosure, objective-content, and appeal. To manage conversations competently, we need to shape our relationships skillfully, self-disclose mindfully, present content comprehensibly, and employ influence effectively. Relationship messages inform about the quality of the relationship and create the overall communication climate, which in turn shapes the relationship. Moreover, relationships are shaped through cultural schemata, storytelling, idioms, routines and rituals, and rules and norms. Social Exchange Theory, Bowlby's Attachment Theory, and Affection Exchange Theory explain how and why relationships are formed. Self-disclosure is the verbal and nonverbal communication of significant personal information that was previously unknown to the receiver. Social Penetration Theory states that we engage in a reciprocal process of self-disclosure. Relational Dialectic Theory argues that relationships evolve in cycles marked by turning points. Social Comparison Theory states that we self-disclose to evaluate ourselves. The Johari window explains the relationship between self-disclosure and self-awareness. The success of a presentation is not defined by the amount of detail conveyed, but by the degree of understanding achieved by the listeners. Thus, we should facilitate the listeners' understanding and prepare our content well, limit the amount of information, build on familiar and simple knowledge, be as comprehensible as possible, and involve the listeners. To reach instrumental goals, we need to employ influence and persuade our interlocutors. Message adaption is the fundamental skill for persuasive success. Facilitating the opening and closing of conversations well is an investment into their effectiveness. The situational model can be helpful to induct an appropriate set. The quality of problem-solving is higher in groups because they combine more resources, and they generally have higher accuracy, commitment, and diversity. To reach their full potential, groups have to establish cohesiveness and overcome the challenges of unequal participations and groupthink.

UNIT 7

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

- identify how to deliver difficult content to mitigate the impact of the messages.
- understand difficult interaction contexts and the way to achieve better solutions.
- know personal styles of conflict management to handle difficult situations.
- recognize the stages of conflict to prepare the appropriate management.

7. DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Introduction

People talk to express their ideas, feelings, and needs. Conversations are an essential part of human relationships. In this unit, you will learn what difficult conversations and situations of tension and conflict in relationships involve.

We tend to believe that we can competently handle difficult conversations or negotiations in conflict situations. However, these instances require a deeper understanding of the issues involved, the stages, and the management modalities of the situations. The objective is to handle difficult conversations, to understand and manage conflict situations, and to maintain healthy relationships.

This unit will address the three dimensions framing difficult conversations: difficult content to communicate, difficult interactions with colleagues and partners, and the conditions that cause conflict. Identifying these conversational conditions will be fundamental for creating an appropriate management strategy. Difficult content, tensions, and conflict situations are part of human relationships; they are inevitable experiences. However, adequate preparation will allow you to deal with them while taking care of personal interests, group objectives, and the emotional framework of relationships.

7.1 Conveying Difficult Content

Difficult content involves information that has a stressful, emotional impact (Richter et al., 2016, p. 3). In the workplace, this is associated with bad news related to layoffs, performance evaluations, salary cuts, and adverse decisions in a worker's professional career. All these situations are emotionally uncomfortable because they generate a negative emotional reaction. In this sense, it is essential to understand that difficult content does not only involve disturbing or uncomfortable information that we deliver or receive when talking to other people. Messages containing difficult content also influence one's inner intimate world because they disturb one's perceptions and emotions, can affect trust in relationships, and generate unpredictability about the responses of those one is close to (Kirkpatrick et al., 2006, p. 16).

The delivery of difficult content implies a very sensitive instance in interactions because people do not receive the contents that disturb the framework of their daily life pleasantly. The words involved in a difficult communication are crucial because these words are not neutral or innocent. They carry meanings and intentions about people's perceptions of events. Perceptions are processes that give meaning to everyday situations; therefore, people do not relate to the facts, but "they relate to what they believe about the facts" (Alberts, 2018, p. 74). These perceptions result from selecting certain meanings and reorganized personal interpretations (Alberts, 2018, p. 76). In this sense, words express the personal version of people's situations.

Perceptions may be framed under negative or positive emotions. For example, if people are fearful or anxious about their bosses, they may perceive that their bosses do not consider them to contribute important ideas or do not value their work. Conversely, more confident and enthusiastic people will perceive every challenge in their work as an opportunity to deploy their personal resources. Often, these perceptions do not correspond to the reality of the facts; they are part of the people's imagination. Therefore, the management of conversations allows adjusting (through language) the reality of perceptions, modifying negative perceptions, and enriching positive ones.

Nonverbal cues influence the meaning of spoken words. For instance, the intonation of voice, gestures, body posture, and room arrangement determine the impact of the words on people's perceptions and emotions (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 2). A boss, for example, may point out the performance faults to an employee empathetically or punish them in an aggressive and authoritarian manner. The words may be the same, but the impact will differ depending on the nonverbal context of the delivery of those words.

Taking care of the delivery of difficult content implies managing both the content of the message and the context of the message delivery. Therefore, the most crucial aspect to take care of is the consequence of these interventions to avoid an **escalation**. While the messengers of difficult content are often the negative characters in these situations, these scenes carry an enormous burden of stress. In fact, the aversion to delivering bad news can cause a delay in the delivery of information, because the messengers feel guilty and are concerned for their self-image and anticipate the possible rejection and conflict in listeners (Richter et al., 2016, p. 4). In this framework, prior training to face these situations allows people who assume this role to have a clearer foresight of the context of the delivery of difficult content and to better handle these situations and their possible derivations. In this instance of training managers to face difficult content delivery situations, two dimensions can be articulated (Richter et al., 2016, p. 4):

Escalation
It is a process in which a conflict is developing with increasing intensity between the parties.

The Formality of the Scene

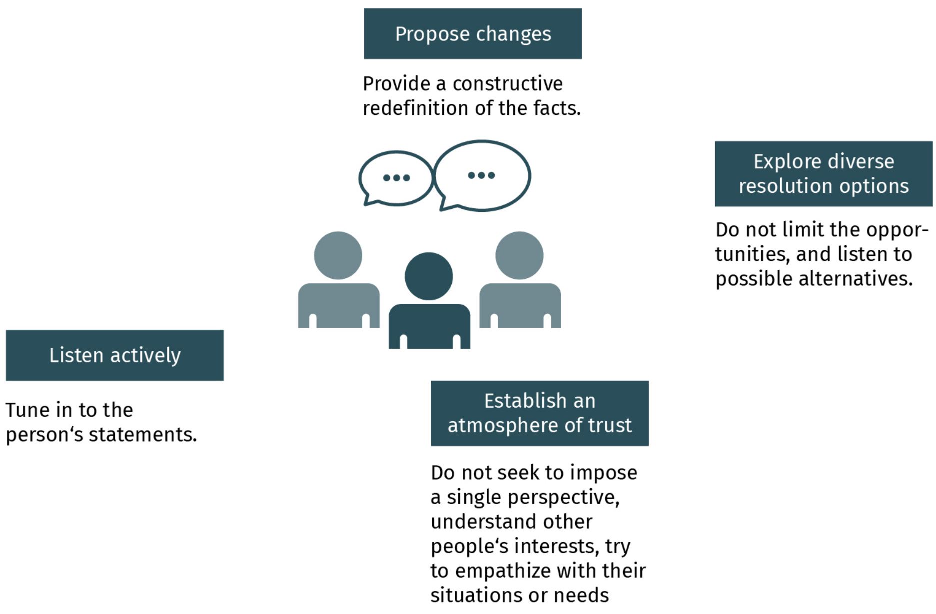
This first dimension is related to the conditions of information delivery. Considering certain aspects of the timing of a delivery is key to mitigating the impact of news. These aspects include: (a) preparing to create a careful and empathetic delivery moment for the people who will receive the news; (b) avoiding euphemisms and distractions, providing the contents directly, and presenting the most negative aspects first (otherwise, it will generate more emotional charge that can be more counterproductive to the rest of the development of the scene); (c) being very clear about all the information that is delivered to complement and justify the first unpleasant contents so that people can have the fullest explanation of the situation; (d) giving space for the expression of the emotions of the people who receive the news. This moment will be unfailing and it is necessary to let the people express their feelings so that they can take them up again; (e) offering certain perspectives on the events and, in case it is appropriate, on the personal situation of the people who receive the bad news; (f) and, finally, summarizing the conversation to address some points that must be made clear again and offering some answers that can remain as the conclusions of the meeting.

Context of Equity

This dimension refers to the processes and procedures framed within a context of fairness. This consideration allows the people receiving the content to mitigate the situation's effects on their emotions and perceptions, because they understand that it is a much more complex and broader situation than a personal relationship. The context of equity implies that there is coherence between the decisions supporting the contents, the decisions are delivered without bias or prejudice of any kind, they maintain ethical principles, and they represent the interests they affect. At this point, the context of equity is complemented by the scene's formality in considering the voices of the people involved, their arguments, and their needs. A context of equity does not resolve the emotional impact of difficult contents, nor does it reverse the decisions generated by these contents. However, it generates a perception of respect and consideration that allows mitigating the impact and leaving a difficult scene, such as these instances, with resources to define the next steps.

These two dimensions of training provide the messenger with resources to deal with different moments in delivering difficult content. These resources are summarized in the movements, gestures, questions, and attitudes that provide a holding frame to mitigate the effects of the content and achieve the delivery objectives with fewer emotional consequences as depicted in the picture below.

Figure 25: Resources for Difficult Content Delivery Situation



Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on Kendall (2016).

Handling Difficult Reactions

While training to deliver difficult content is key to mitigating the impact of these messages on the emotional framework of the people receiving the news, the messenger is not immune to the emotional drain (Richter et al., 2016, p. 24). In this regard, it is necessary to consider three personal aspects to sustain these scenes (Kendall, 2016, p. 127):

1. **Do not react compulsively**. People often wait for your reaction before jumping on it and taking the conversation to an aggressive escalation. The first point is to avoid public confrontation, even if you would want to engage in a verbal battle. It could adversely affect the development of the scene. If you remain patient, the conversation will be refocused on the specific content and you will be able to get back to handling the arguments prepared for that situation.
2. **Analyze personal needs**. Listen to the people's arguments to explore the roots of their reactions. Ask questions to expand the meaning of some words and understand what emotions are associated with them, what stories are attached to them, and what experiences they represent about the people's inner world. These keywords will allow you to know what needs, shortcomings, and expectations the people are displaying in their arguments, and you will be able to address them more carefully in your discourse.
3. **Take a necessary pause**. Pausing to calm the situation is required if the conversation reaches hostile instances. This can be a temporary pause (taking a break) or moving on to another topic to mitigate the climate of the discussions.

Considering and addressing these personal aspects is important for framing the communication context and condition the delivery and interpretation of messages, because the communication's effectiveness depends on the communicator's **credibility** (Ruck, 2019, p. 156). Therefore, credibility does not depend on the person's position, age, or profession; rather, it depends on the context of message delivery.

Credibility
The attitude towards a communication source held by the receiver.

7.2 Difficult Interaction Partners

Even after having prepared the delivery context and considered the fairness aspects of content delivery, what may occur in a scene has a certain margin of unpredictability. One's behavior is often not predictable enough to understand the timing or justifications for certain reactions which make the interaction difficult. However, three essential dimensions of human behavior can be analyzed to understand or anticipate certain people's responses. The ABC model (Hill et al., 2016, p.16) breaks down and segments behavior into three dimensions to better understand it and mitigate difficult reactions.

Antecedents

These are the motivational (stress, family problems), physical (fatigue, ailment, building discomfort), or situational (work relationships, multitasking, demands) roots that exist prior to the behavior. Often, the unfounded reaction is not a product of the present scene, but the person explodes because of the antecedents that are activated by previous information or situation. In the same way, the consequence of a behavior can be an antecedent for future reactions. Therefore, understanding the prior reaction framework is essential for understanding the present response and anticipating the possible future reactions.

Behavior

This is the visible dimension in the interaction; it is what a person does or manifests. The management of behaviors in the interactions is a sensitive point because it involves influencing, guiding, supporting, adjusting, and modifying the behaviors of others. Behavior management can have two orientations: reinforcement and punishment. These definitions refer to increasing or decreasing the presence of a behavior. Examples of these interventions include giving a compliment, a benefit (positive reinforcement), not assigning a task (negative reinforcement), a critical remark (positive punishment), removing a privilege, or a change of position or responsibility (negative punishment). Understanding and recognizing the ways to apply these reinforcements are essential to anticipating and intervening in the manifestation and transformation of behaviors in a relationship.

Consequences

These are the behaviors or situations that occur due to other behaviors. This implies that every consequence has antecedents, so anticipating inevitable consequences may be fundamental to analyzing the impact conditions of certain content. In other words, all content delivery will have effects. Therefore, it is important to consider the possible consequences of the content when organizing the delivery of the content to anticipate how to mitigate the possible negative effects.

Dysfunctional
Forms of relationships that do not respond to healthy or respectable norms

In the workplace, difficult interactions are enhanced by stressful contexts (Maltese, 2022, p. 8). What could be stressful contexts? Stressful contexts are those that predispose people to a personal defense position because they feel vulnerable and threatened. This framework of hostile contexts negatively affects personal interrelationships because people learn **dysfunctional** patterns of interaction and assume them as the normal conditions of communication (Ruck, 2019, p. 156). Research on difficult work contexts by Porath (2015) showed an unusual finding about the reason these work conditions occur; more than half of the managers responded that they did not have time to be nice and thus justified their dysfunctional communication in work relationships . When the context is not transparent due to contradictions in messages, it generates dissonances and the people's alerts. Dissonance is the state of discomfort caused by the presence of opposing, paradoxical, or contradictory thoughts. These contradictions in ideas put pressure on people in need to create an integrative argument (Thomas et al., 2018, p. 343). The dissonance of ideas influences changes in attitudes and behaviors at work. Thus, the way people resolve their contradictory ideas influences understanding and positioning in communication (Beauchamp & Baran, 2015, p. 292).

7.3 Conflicts

The neat preparation of your message does not guarantee that your interlocutor understands and agrees with it. Communication is a negotiation of meanings and a negotiation of personal needs and the needs of others (Beauchamp & Baran, 2015, p. 119). These negotiations contain potential conflict, i.e., “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties, who perceive incompatible goals, low rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” (Wilmot & Hocker, 2017, p. 9).

It should be clarified that disagreeing with a particular point of view does not necessarily imply a conflict. Conflict means a communicative behavior of struggling (not negotiation) expressing ideas, values, desires, or needs (Wilmot & Hocker, 2017, p. 10). This behavioral aspect is crucial because it shows that the parties involved in the conflict have interdependence, i.e., they are connected in some manner (they may be family members, workers, or neighbors). This means that the conflict arises because one person’s decisions affect those of others.

Conflict also indicates interference with personal goals; that is, the parties involved in a relationship believe that the other person is limiting possibilities or attacking the development of their projects. In some cases, interference is concrete (e.g., a colleague does not provide adequate information, does not attend meetings, or generates false information). In other cases, interferences are perceptions that the people have about the behaviors of others.

Moments of the Conflict

The fact that interpersonal conflict can be negotiated means that it goes through different stages. The human rights expert, Eric Brahm (2003), identified seven stages of conflicts:

Latent moment

It is a moment of tension in the relationship when you feel something is going to happen. This latent tension may disappear or evolve into a situation of increased tension. This means that the explosion of the conflict has antecedents that are not revealed until the problem manifests itself.

Moment of emergence

It is the moment of the explosion of tension which may arise from a significant event, or due to a chain of minor conflicts that unleashes an episode of crisis. Faced with this instance of conflict, it is necessary to address it to mitigate the adverse effects of this situation on relationships. This is an important point because the manifest situation cannot be hidden or dismissed; otherwise, it leads to significant negative consequences.

Moment of escalation

Aggressiveness and attack can increase in this instance, i.e., even if the parties do not reach a confrontation, they are prepared for that possible moment. This situation increases conflict and the risk of an aggressive confrontation. However, the escalation may not lead to a fight and the parties may rethink their attitude before the crisis. The resolution depends on the emotional framework and the management of that moment to avoid a confrontation.

Moment of stagnation

This instance can also be considered a moment of exhaustion, when no one wants to give up their position but, at the same time, they are very tired because they consumed lots of their energy and resources in the escalation situation. This situation occurs when the escalation reaches a point where it is difficult to return to the previous position, because the person feels that doing so would involve resigning or losing their identity, prestige, and commitment.

Moment of de-escalation and negotiation

This is the moment of rapprochement between the parties when the situation becomes untenable. Sometimes this instance results from the attitude of one of the parties in the relationship who leaves the escalation position to recompose relations. It can also happen when an external event changes the personal situations of the people in conflict and they must change their position accordingly, because the external pressure of the events pushes them to negotiate a way out of the conflict situation.

Moment of agreement and resolution

This is the moment when the conflict ceases. This may mean a non-aggression agreement. Even if the enmity continues or there is no real forgiveness or reconciliation, the parties agree to end the conflict situation. It may also happen when the people reconcile, redefine their positions, and resume a healthy relationship.

Conflict Management Styles

Conflict management is critical to avoid escalation because the final phase of an unresolved instance of conflict is a destructive compulsion that can lead the parties to their own self-destruction (Jordan, 2000, p. 8). This situation can involve reputation, financial bankruptcy, the definitive rupture of relationships (personal, commercial, and with clients), and legal and life risks. In this context, awareness of the individual conflict management style is essential to bring tense situations to a positive and healthy resolution for the parties involved. The way we handle conflict situations depends, in part, on personal characteristics. For example, each person learns educational, familial, or social conflict management patterns differently. There are also corporate cultures that tend to create conflicts and push personal relationships to the limit of tension. In addition to the personal history of exposure to conflict, one's style of managing it is defined by the way one balances personal interests with those of other parties involved in the conflict (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975, p. 972). Within this framework, five management styles can be identified (Rahim & Magner, 1995, p. 122):

Integrative style

This style maintains a balance between considering personal interests and those of others at the same level. In this sense, the involved parties favor collaboration as well as open and direct communication to examine the differences that may be causing the conflict and reach a mutually acceptable solution. This style is based on fairness and **equanimity** to achieve resolutions with which both parties feel satisfied.

Equanimity
Mental state of equilibrium and objective position regarding the facts

Servant style

This style prioritizes the welfare of others, relegating personal interests. The involved parties try to minimize the differences and satisfy the needs of others as a priority. Although this style may generate a quick solution to the conflict, because one of the parties gives in quickly, the solution may not be sustainable, may turn out to be false, or may lead to other conflicts.

Dominant style

This style is the opposite of the previous one. In this style, the involved parties seek to win or win in the resolution of the conflict. It is based on personal interests and is imposed by using force, verbal vehemence, and non-verbal aggression. This style can also produce a quick resolution of the conflict because one of the parties sweeps away the interests of the other. However, this is only a temporary solution since the tension of interests has not been resolved. In fact, there is no real resolution, and one party is simply silenced by force. Therefore, the reasons for the conflict remain latent and may lead to further escalations with greater severity.

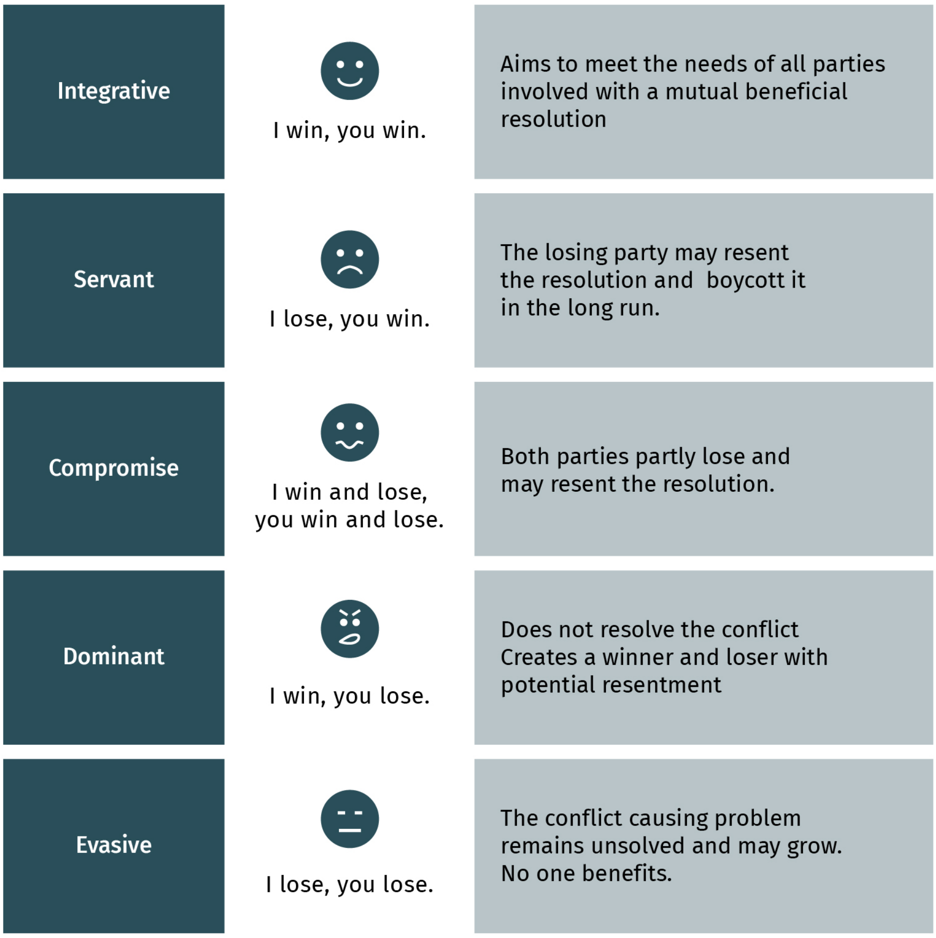
Evasive style

In this case, people tend to hide in the face of conflicts. This style is associated with low concern about personal interests and the interests of others. In evasive style, conflicts are minimized, tension is naturalized as part of the working conditions, and events are left to follow. People using this style prefer accommodating stress rather than facing it. This situation causes the growth of conflicts and lead to multiple uncomfortable situations because nobody takes responsibility for the discomfort in relationships and the permanence of tension.

Compromise style

This last style implies a forced resolution of the conflicts, i.e., the involved parties have a moderate concern for self-interest and mild concern for the interests of the others. Therefore, they are not interested in entering tension. Instead, what is negotiated is a transitory peace. This situation will probably generate a conflict that cannot be stopped, or people will live together under a superficial relationship that does not create personal growth. This superficial coexistence is sufficient in some environments or relationships, but it is always necessary to ensure that this tacit peace situation is not drastically disrupted.

Figure 26: Conflict Management Styles



Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on DeVito (2017).

Addressing Personal Conflict Management Style

Understanding emotional styles are fundamental to anticipating your habitual and automatic reactions to certain situations. In this way, you are aware of adjusting your responses and avoiding inappropriate strategies that will not achieve the best results. There are no universally applicable recipes for conflict resolution because each conflict and each person is different. With this premise in mind, it is important to focus on personal resources that allow one to maintain a state of alert negotiation of situations and one's own emotional framing of decisions (Martin & Nakayama, 2017, p. 450). These points allow you to think about some key suggestions:

Do not go to extremes

Try to maintain equanimity. Keeping a centered point of view is necessary to avoid extremes (black or white) and to simplify the arguments to support a position. Avoid excluding ideas to be open to other perspectives and to understand and respect other points of view. Beware of compulsive angry reactions or frustration with the behavior of others. Explore the background of the situation and know the motives and aspects of an argument or personal position. If you make critical observations, focus these observations on behavior not on individual characteristics, because you will trigger the other party's immediate reaction.

Maintain communication

Taking distance does not mean contempt or underestimation. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain communication and to be clear about the need to consider a pause. Making a pause does not belittle the relationship. However, total blocking of communication, silent responses, and an untimely withdrawal from the conflict without a word often target the other party's self-esteem and therefore hurt the relationship. This is a sign of contempt to avoid; it is a mechanism of manipulation, not of personal space.

Use different styles

Each person has a dominant style, but that style is not always appropriate for managing the entire conflict process. For example, broadening the range of responses may be necessary to deal with different moments in conflict situations. Each person should be clear about their dominant style to know when it is appropriate to use it and when to use another style that is more suitable to a situation. Identifying one's own style prevents you from acting compulsively and from asking yourself review questions about your interventions in the conflict (e.g., why give in, what should I defend, and what is the point of escalation).

Recognize the context of the conflict

Conflict can often be an opportunity to build a better relationship than the one existed before. But if mismanaged, conflict can also be destructive. It is important to understand what the meaning of conflict is. There is always an interference, a disturbance from the other party in one's personal life.

Manage the conflict with an agreement in mind

The solution may be to forgive, ask for forgiveness, or employ other instances of agreement. Even agreements may not change the emotional position towards the other party, but the focus is put on something other than continuing the confrontation. This point directs your style towards resolution rather than compulsive escalation. That is, keeping resolution in mind will prevent your interventions and negotiations from drifting into emotional reactions, argumentative questioning, or victimization.

Stages of Conflict Management

Conflicts are managed in various ways, depending on the problem and the people involved. However, the following steps in the conflict management process appear to be useful for most, if not all, interpersonal conflicts (DeVito, 2017, p. 294):

Look for the appropriate setting

Generally, the stage for resolving a conflict is a private space, sometimes a space with a mediator. Addressing a conflict in public (especially on social networks) puts people's relationships at risk, and sometimes the consequences are irreversible. Therefore, preparing a suitable stage is necessary to resolve these situations without risky exposures.

Define the reason for the conflict

When asked why we are fighting, there are two aspects to consider. Either the conflict is due to content or conceptual issues (we are fighting over an idea) or due to relationship issues (attitudes, power, emotions). The definition must be concrete (avoid abstractions and projections into the future). This is an important point to clarify and adjust the perceptions and emotions at play. For example, are they in line with the facts? Are they overstated? Where do these perceptions and emotions arise from?

Identify the personal purpose

It is essential to define what you want to achieve in conflict management. Taking a personal position will allow you to know when to give in, what to avoid, what to defend, and what options to explore in the interaction. This aspect is the core of management for not being driven by emotional impulses and the need to impose a personal vision in the negotiation.

Act in the present

When exploring different options, it is necessary to choose and act step by step on the selected course without anticipating future scenarios (especially mental ones), because it is necessary to evaluate the outcome of that option on the fly, not on assumptions of the results. If the selected option works, then move on to the last step. If the chosen option does not work, you must re-enter the conflict resolution process at some point; you may have to redefine the problem or look for other options. Do not contaminate the negotiation steps with distorted perceptions (situations that do not exist) about the results of the process.

Learn from the conflict

Although conflicts are tense and exhausting situations that one wants to forget, they can be instances of personal growth. Therefore, it is important to learn something from each conflict so as not to victimize oneself or become frustrated because of negative evaluations of the resolution of the conflict. Negative thoughts about personal roles, conflict resolutions, or decisions often leave people emotionally devastated and frustrated.

7.4 Feedback Rules

Organizational processes require fluidity in the exchange of content through different communication processes, whether face-to-face or through channels. Measuring the effectiveness of understanding messages and their content's impact is crucial to adjusting and enriching the exchange and the behaviors resulting from this shared content. Often, it is believed that information delivery is enough to learn a new process, adopt new behaviors, or follow specific norms. However, personal perception is more complex than the simple reception of information.

People are influenced by other contextual factors in their work relations, such as organizational climate, information overload, access to specific channels, and understanding the code or language of messages. The communication process does not end with the delivery of appropriate content through planned and controlled channels. Communication fulfills its objective when messages fulfill the purposes for which they were created. It is thus essential to evaluate purpose fulfillment in conversational processes feedback (Gallrein et al., 2018, p. 1).

The communication process' effectiveness depends on people's commitment to the relationship. This effectiveness involves two aspects: the characteristics of the content delivered (quality, suitability, and relevance), and the adjustments to the content and effects to the specific relationship (Ruck, 2019, p. 126). These adjustments are generated through a feedback process. Feedback is a comment that one of the parties gives back to the others about their interpretation of the content or their appreciation of a particular behavior (Hill et al., 2007, p. 10). For example, in the workplace, these comments may be spontaneous suggestions given by one colleague to another on how to improve the presentation of a budget or the delivery of a management report. Likewise, feedback may involve a personal observation that one person gives to another about the indifferent attitude they received in response to a request for information or inappropriate comments about other colleagues. Feedback always fulfills an adjustment function that allows the interaction of people to find points of balance in the understanding of messages and behaviors that enable relationships. Feedback can be part of daily conversations; it can be given spontaneously in exchanging messages (Beger, 2018, p. 169). Feedback can also be part of a more formal process to evaluate professional development and performance in an interview or group instance (Church et al., 2019, p. 14).

In the daily processes of interpersonal communication in the workplace, feedback can be positive and negative. The first feedback modality includes all appreciations, observations, and comments aimed at sustaining the results. When negative, feedback provides information to correct results, redefine incorrect or incomplete processes, and provide improvement proposals to adjust these behaviors (Gallrein et al., 2018, p. 3).

The objective of feedback as a performance evaluation process is not to sanction but to adjust behaviors according to better performance. Therefore, negative feedback does not mean punishment, attacks, or complaints. In that case, such communication would no longer be feedback but an aggressive attack communication (Kim & Kim, 2020, p. 586).

Five basic rules must be followed for feedback with the intention of evaluation so that the process is enriching (Sánchez Henríquez & Calderón, 2012, p. 63). These rules guide the feedback to be the following:

- **timely**, to address a situation at the right time and in the necessary proportion (to be precise with the intervention)
- **balanced**, so that it may have both positive aspects and suggestions to redefine the negative aspects
- **descriptive** of the processes or behaviors for which the feedback is given
- **focused** on the behavior to be adjusted or modified, not addressing characteristics or personality traits
- **positive**, oriented to help and not to punish.

Feedback and Leadership

The 360-degree feedback method started as a developmental tool for leaders in the 1970s when organizations began using standardized methods to collect performance information (Fleenor et al., 2020, p. 9). Nowadays, the purpose of feedback as an appraisal tool is to provide accurate and useful information about performance effectiveness through collecting and reporting peer ratings.

As an evaluation process, formal feedback provides something that spontaneous conversational feedback usually does not: a structured means of collecting and evaluating data and the opportunity to reflect on this valuable information (Fleenor et al., 2020, p. 12). This way, the feedback process links individuals' behaviors to organizational performance. Also, feedback will enable people to discover how their behaviors are perceived by their managers, colleagues, subordinates, and colleagues (Lepsinger, 2009, p. 3).

The decision on the information to be collected will depend on several factors. This is important to consider because there is no single feedback model. Basically, this decision is consistent with the information needs, the business or leadership problem or opportunity to be addressed, the role and level of the person who will receive the feedback, and the organization's norms and values regarding what is considered acceptable and appropriate. While an organization may have specific evaluation needs, there are three basic dimensions that are evaluated, the results of which are delivered to receiving parties in a feedback process. (Lepsinger, 2009, p. 11):

1. **Skill**. This is the ability to perform a task and reach a degree of mastery (e.g., strategic thinking, communication, coordination, motivation, negotiation, machine operation).
2. **Knowledge**. The is the level of familiarity with a subject or discipline (e.g., knowledge of an industry, business, community, software, or models).
3. **Style**. This involves types of behaviors that are manifestations of personal traits (e.g., self-esteem, empathy, emotional intelligence).

Feedback as a formal evaluation process is challenging because the people involved in these situations must be willing to give and receive comments with respect and empathy (Reina & Reina, 2015, p. 61). This means being willing to listen and avoiding being defensive because, otherwise, the process will forego the possibility of learning and adjustment. For this process to positively impact performance, it is necessary to maintain basic rules to achieve an effective, respectful, and enriching outcome (Garvin & Margolis, 2021, p. 48).

Define an appropriate professional team

The feedback process is specific to each situation. Therefore, it is important that the team carrying out these interventions can have the professional breadth to adjust to different areas of the organization, problems, and productive contexts. In this sense, an organization can design a process to diagnose personal areas of development and create a team to provide feedback to specific roles on their improvement points, development needs, and training guidelines. Generally, this type of project is managed by the Human Resources department, which supports the development of skills necessary to sustain an organization's operational and competitive capacity.

Understand the objective of the intervention

It is essential to focus on the key aspects and discard all other secondary information unrelated to what is to be evaluated to improve performance. In a feedback evaluation process, information or statements about performance may be uncomfortable to give or receive. Therefore, it is important to be clear about the focus of the feedback intervention to frame the meaning of these observations from a professional point of view.

Explore alternatives for improvement

The feedback process can be the basis for exploring performance improvement paths. Evaluation entails expanding the options for development or innovation in actions. If the process does not include possibilities for improvement, the people receiving feedback will feel frustrated and demotivated because they perceive that they are being penalized.

Define implementation decisions

The feedback must generate conditions of commitment for new actions beyond the understanding and exploration of the causes for improvement. This is the moment to compare and weigh decisions, consequences, and implications of the previously explored courses of action.

Implement the improvement actions

This point is the end of an evaluation process and the beginning of a new period of adjustment and further evaluation. However, evaluation is useless if there is no implementation of decisions. This point is critical, not only for performance improvement but also for people's morale. For example, if people perceive that everything that comes to light in the evaluation process has no impact on improvement actions, they will believe that it is all a futile exercise that does not change performance conditions.

SUMMARY

Conversations are spontaneous processes of daily expressions in which people unfold their inner world and share their ideas, feelings, and experiences. Conversations connect people and enable them to get to know, support, work with, and entertain each other. However, human relationships are not only composed of conversations that nurture and allow growth. At some points in life, we face difficult conversations that disrupt our daily life and affect our emotional world. Difficult conversations are not only manifested in content that delivers negative, disruptive, or harmful messages, but they also arise in the face of conflict, power, misinterpretations, prejudices, and instances of stress and pressure in social spaces.

Difficult conversations may also arise from differing points of view or tensions due to certain tasks. However, they can be approached and resolved when we are prepared to determine the context of the approach and consider personal reactions so as not to transform difficult conversations or tense situations into conflicts. The development of conflicts has different moments, from gestation to the moments of greatest tension and risk. Therefore, recognizing the signs of escalation and tension makes it possible to anticipate the consequences of certain conflict situations, act preventively, and protect oneself from the harmful effects of conflicts.

Communication implies adjustments in the interpretation of content, understanding the effects of messages, and adopting or redefinition behaviors. This adjustment is generated through feedback that allows the parties involved in a communication process to give their point of view on the contents they send and receive. Feedback is a spontaneous process in informal interpersonal conversations. However, it can also be applied as a formal evaluation process so that adjustments in understanding and behavior enrich people's role performance.

UNIT 8

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

STUDY GOALS

On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

- understand the presentation modalities and their differential objectives.
- know the contribution of rhetoric to the structure of an argument.
- describe how to prepare and deliver a public speech.
- analyze the challenges of public speaking in social media.

8. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Introduction

When talking about public speaking, you may think of images of Ancient Greece with wise men sharing their knowledge with a group of pupils. The techniques of public speech came from those ancient practices, many of which are still in use today. Since those scenes from around 2300 years ago, communication contexts, media, and cultures have changed. However, public speech retains the same goal: to influence the thoughts and behaviors of an audience (Martin, 2020, p. 171).

Public speech is the delivery of messages to an audience. You may think of this activity as a routine of celebrities, corporate spokespersons, or politicians. However, there are many situations where it is necessary to organize a series of ideas to present publicly.

In this unit, we will look at the structure of different public speeches, and the importance of planning and preparing the content and the speaker before delivering a speech. We will also analyze the structure of the message for its effect on the audience and the different delivery modes. Public speech is present in everyday situations in many professional, social, and academic contexts. Knowing how to structure and deliver a public speech is crucial to create an image of reliability and security for the target audiences of certain messages.

8.1 Types

Public speech involves the process of interaction (DeVito, 2017, p. 289). This means that public speech integrates different aspects related to the creation of the message (such as the means of expression, the length of the speech, formal or informal language), the delivery (channels, technology, codes), and the reception (the cultural characteristics of the audience and the conditions of reception). Interaction also implies that the audience is not passive in the reception of a message. Although the protagonists in a public speech are the persons delivering the message and the focus is on them, the audience communicates with applauses, body postures, yawns, questions, and facial expressions (Kang et al., 2019, p. 90).

Public speech situations can be varied, ranging from academic presentations, presentations by corporate authorities, government presentations or leadership presentations, or simply the presentation of a manager to their work group. In each of these cases, public speeches can have two objectives: to inform or to persuade.

Informative Presentation

Informative presentation aims to reveal certain content to people (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 379). The effectiveness of an informative speech depends on the display and credibility of that information. In this sense, there are five key dimensions to consider in an informative presentation (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 379):

Definition

This dimension involves presenting the object of the speech. There are different ways to define the object of a speech. It can be defined through a comparison showing the similarity between something well-known and something less well-known. Contrast can be used to define differences. Synonyms can be used, i.e., using other words with similar meanings to express what you are trying to define. Technical definitions can also be used through the presentation of a sequence or process.

Description

This dimension involves the language used in the presentation. Informative presentations require concrete and precise descriptions rather than generalities and abstractions. However, language precision does not contradict the use of descriptive images, which engage the people's senses in the delivery and allow the audience to see, hear, and feel what the message expresses.

Explanation

This dimension involves the development and connection of ideas within the message. The explanation becomes interesting through analysis, the relationship of themes and events, and the speaker's ability to synthesize and present complex concepts. In this sense, it is essential that each paragraph of the message expresses an idea and includes narrative connections with the other sections that make up the delivery of the message.

Narration

This dimension is related to the orality of the presentation. It brings the speaker's capacity for interpretation, intonation, and dramatic emphasis in delivering the speech.

Demonstration

This dimension implies reliable support of the information. In some cases, it is feasible to do it through statistics, testimonies, and practical examples. In other cases, it is necessary to propose exercises of imagination of scenarios and forecasts of events.

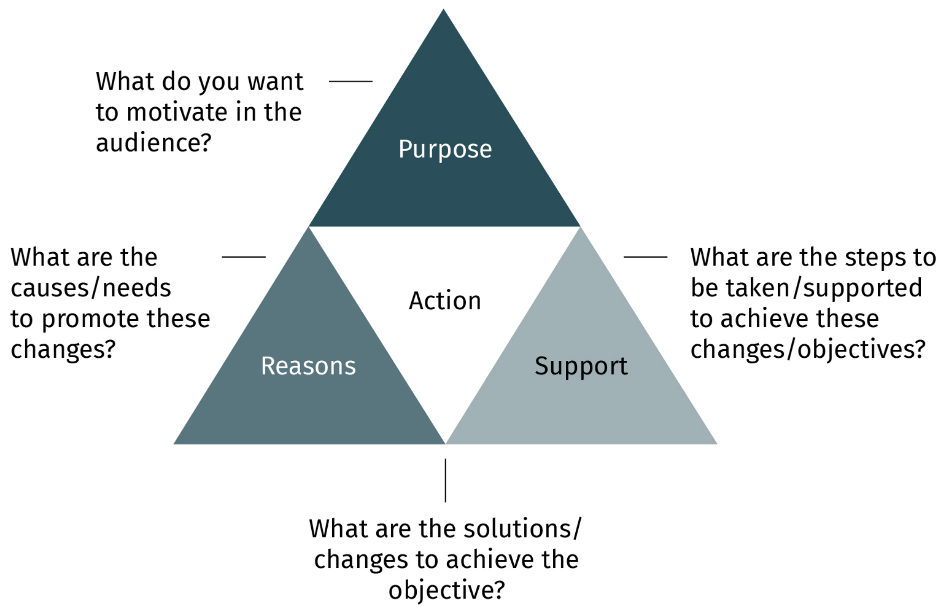
Persuasive Presentation

A persuasive presentation is a message strategically designed to induce an audience's change of ideas or behaviors (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 392). Persuasive presentation seeks to make people choose the option it is trying to convince (Adler et al., 2016, p. 375; Carwile, 2012, p. 151). Therefore, its distinguishing aspect is that it must have an immediate purpose to be achieved through the **arguments** delivered.

Arguments
Structure of facts presented sequentially to support reasoning

The purpose of the presentation is an important factor differentiating between persuasive and informative presentations. In an informative presentation, the purpose is provided at the beginning of the speech. A persuasive presentation is handled strategically and according to the topic's sensitivity, the type of audience, and the level of change or transformation that is being sought with the arguments. In this framework, the purpose is the apex of a pyramid that other argument sections must support to sustain the persuasiveness of the presentation (Carwile, 2012, p. 155).

Figure 27: Argument Structure



Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on (Carwile, 2012).

Definition of the Structure of the Argument

The persuasive purpose can be supported by two types of argumentative structure. First, the persuasive argument can be organized in a linear sequence focused on the conditions of the problem or issue to be addressed (problem–cause–solution). Second, the argument can be structured in a sequence focused on incentivizing actions, a sequence based on motivation for change (Carwile, 2012, p. 166). The first structure is a simple, linear design. This structure allows audiences to understand the framework of a situation and the mediations or actions needed to bring about change (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 328).

In the second case, the motivated sequence structure was created in 1930 by Alan Monroe to encourage change actions in people (Grand Valley, 2019). Despite the years, this structure is still used as a modality in many forms of persuasive presentations like advertising, and political or commercial speeches. The structure of a motivated sequence involves the following steps (Carwile, 2012, p. 166):

1. **Attention**. This first step involves attracting the audience's interest. It is a crucial step because if people do not show attraction at the beginning of the speech, there will be little chance that they become interested in the rest of the argument.
2. **Need**. This second step focuses on a sensitive issue for the audience, which the person or organization delivering the message can address and solve. This step should connect audiences to the point of dissatisfaction or discomfort.
3. **Satisfaction**. This step starts the body section of the presentation and presents the solution to solve the need shown in the previous step. This is the step in which the appeal to change appears as a way to solve the need previously stated.
4. **Visualization**. In this step, a mental image of the solution is created. It is a very descriptive and graphic moment that appeals to the senses and emotions to support the motivation for action. In this step, people's strengths can be encouraged, and resistance can also be highlighted. In both cases, it is necessary to use a language that is rich in **sensory imagery** to achieve the connection of people with the mental image.
5. **Action**. This final step is part of the conclusion, the call to action. This is when you conclude by appealing to the audience to do something about the need previously stated. It is important to close the speech by returning to the point previously used to attract attention and thus reinforce the persuasive emphasis of the presentation.

Sensory imagery
It is a descriptive language that appeals to the five senses as a factor of attraction of a person to the narrator's speech.

8.2 Rhetoric

Rhetoric is an argumentation technique used to gain an audience's conformity on a specific topic (Herrick, 2017, p. 4). It is often considered to be a manipulative technique. However, we often seek to achieve other people's approval on everyday issues; for example, it can be a simple conversation about the causes of the poor performance of our favorite team or a heated political discussion. Spontaneous rhetoric is tacitly present in the way we organize our arguments to achieve specific goals in a conversation. Likewise, rhetoric is used in corporate relationships and often becomes an essential tool to achieve political or economic goals, project a strong identity, and sustain trustworthy relationships with different audiences (Ihlen & Heath, 2018, p. 20).

Rhetoric and persuasion are often used as synonyms for achieving persuasion. Herrick (2017) defines rhetoric as the systematic study of persuasion because it seeks to understand and uses the aspects that work in the structure of a presentation to convince people of our arguments. Rhetoric is expressed by different structures of symbols, not only through language, which is the most popular mode of expression. In this sense, rhetoric is a way to organize the structure of symbols to express a message (Zwilling, 2022, p. 366). What is the legacy of rhetoric, and why is it still valid as a discursive strategy? Rhetoric provides us with six fundamental characteristics to shape an argumentative structure that influences specific audiences (Herrick, 2017, p. 9):

Planning

This stage involves analysis and decisions about how one can best combine elements to generate the desired effects on audiences. What should you consider in planning? What arguments will you develop? What evidence supports those arguments? What structure will the delivery have? What code or type of language should we use given the audience's characteristics?

Adaptation

This point involves understanding the audience's motivations and feelings about the topic to be delivered and considering how to reach that emotional dimension to move them towards the objectives of the argument. Each audience is different. The structure must be adjusted to each audience's language, experiences, and expectations.

Connection

Rhetoric structure seeks a connection with people's motivation to achieve an action, such as gaining adherents to values or ideas, seeking cooperation, and creating a group consensus. Connection implies knowing, studying, and empathizing with the audience's motivations. This point is closely linked to the charisma of the person delivering the message or the emotional tone of the argument (in case it is written). If the speech succeeds in connecting with the emotional world of the listeners, they will feel that they are understood and therefore identify with the message.

Response

Rhetoric responds to a situation and is structured in response to specific circumstances such as political situations, ethical issues, social values, controversial issues, and social rights. The rhetorical structure must be oriented towards responding to the problems that are the argument's object.

Sensitivity

Rhetoric addresses issues that are important to people. Rhetoric arises as a search for answers to issues and situations that need to be addressed, are uncomfortable, or are important to people's lives. In this framework, the rhetoric structure must present options and solutions to address sensitive issues, dilemmas, or questions with no apparent answers for audiences.

Persuasion

This feature is perhaps the most significant feature of rhetoric. Persuasion involves influencing people to act. This goal can be as simple as a conversation with a friend about the choice of a favorite artist, and the expressions of a politician or religious leader about certain aspects of morals, rights, and values. There are four essential resources that define persuasive rhetorical structure:

1. **Argumentation**. This resource is intended for the organization of causes and connection with solutions. Argumentation is the preparation of a logical conceptual path to arrive at a well-founded conclusion. Therefore, argumentation involves the form of presentation of the central and secondary concepts, the connection between these concepts, the substantiation of the concepts, and the contribution of other sources (numbers, definitions, authors) that support the association of the ideas advocating the argument.
2. **Appeals**. They are resources that provoke a specific emotion related to the central subject of the speech and mobilize people to a particular attitude. Traditional examples of appeals are directed to values, homeland, ethics, rights, and dignity, among other sensitive aspects of people's lives. Complementing appeals with arguments is fundamental to achieving a persuasive impact by balancing the rational and the emotional effects.
3. **Arrangement**. This aspect defines where, how, and when different resources of the message are presented. For example, when to give the central argument, when to make an appeal, and how to close a speech.
4. **Aesthetics**. It is an element that adds form, beauty, and originality to the symbolic expression. Aesthetics is the resource that brings all the other previous resources into a final impact for audiences. Aesthetics helps the audience connect, be attracted to, and make discoveries through the presentation. It can be expressed in the images or visual design of the elements used for the presentation and in how the narrative of the speech is expressed.

8.3 Preparing

Preparation for a public speech has two key dimensions: the structure of the message and the speaker's personal preparation. The impact of the message on audiences depends on the complementarity of these two dimensions. More than 2300 years ago, Aristotle noted that the "character of a speaker can almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 279).

The credibility of the message's source is one of the most important aspects of speech effectiveness. Credibility is not something that genuinely arises with the organizational role or position. Just because a person holds the manager's position does not mean that they are credible; a lower-ranking person in an organization may be more believable. What does this mean? It means that credibility must be cultivated in relationships in two ways: First, through the characteristics of the source or speaker (their history, their behavior, their performance in the presentation); second, through the perception that audiences have of the speaker (what they feel, what they intuit, what they infer). For instance, in an organization, a manager may be a credible source for investors but not a credible source for the unions.

The context of trust is framed in four aspects and the speaker must consider them when preparing the speech. They are competence, trustworthiness, dynamism, and common ground (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 279).

Competence. This is the audience's perception of the speaker's knowledge and expertise about the subject they are talking about. In order to deliver a successful speech, the speakers must consider the following points: being sufficiently informed to project personal confidence in delivering the content; preparing the sequence of ideas to be delivered in a way that the audience can follow the speech without distraction or confusion; relying on visual or technological elements that they are familiar with and feel comfortable using during the meeting; and the practice of intonation, pauses, and body positions in the case of messages being delivered verbally.

Trustworthiness. This aspect refers to the speaker's characteristics, ethics, empathy, and kindness. An organization also projects these characteristics from its corporate personality, for instance, respectful, ethical, and responsible organizations. One of the most critical points to consider in trustworthiness is how a person's or organization's past behaviors condition their image in the present. The speaker's character is manifested in the way they treat the audience (empathetic versus authoritarian treatment), and in the diversity of sources and points of view they contemplate in the structure of the message (for example, the respect for other arguments, other beliefs, and other theoretical or philosophical perspectives). The channel chosen to deliver the message can trigger feelings of closeness, empathy, or rejection in the audience and lead to anger in their reactions. For instance, presenting personally at a meeting indicates responsibility, as opposed to sending a communiqué or a pre-recorded video.

Dynamism. The third aspect of credibility is the source's energy in message delivery. The simplest way to understand this point is that both a dull speaker and a boring text do not convey any attraction and therefore do not affect the audience's connection to the message. In the case of a spoken message, this aspect is expressed through voice and the body movements. In a written message, it is expressed through the narrative quality, the type of language (formal or informal), and the structure of ideas.

Common ground. This aspect refers to values, beliefs, attitudes, and interests that frame the message. Every person or organization speaks from a frame of reference that encompasses their social, political, and economic ideas. There are no challenges in relationship with audiences if the frame of reference is shared. However, this is a sensitive issue when dealing with audiences who may not share a frame of reference. In such cases, it is crucial to create minimum conditions to arrive at some shared common grounds. Despite the differences, you need to (a) find the points on which you have commonalities and highlight them to focus the message on what you have in common and (b) accept the differences as a possibility to enrich the actions and provide spaces to expand the dialogue and joint solutions.

Message Preparation

Having analyzed the preparation of source of the message as well as who delivers the message, let us now concentrate on preparing the message itself. In this framework, we can consider a fundamental tripod of preparation: the topic, the purpose, and the audience characteristics (Adler et al., 2016, p. 297).

Choice of the topic

This is the first central point of preparation. The topic to be chosen must be meaningful for the source and audience and relevant to the situation (DeVito, 2017, p. 289). The connection to the audience's interests is critical to the speech's appeal. The focus on the audience's interest will allow the message to be centralized on the specific points that are most sensitive to address.

Definition of the purpose

This second point refers to the intention behind the presentation of the topic. What is the personal or institutional motive for deploying the development of this topic? For instance, you can start from defining a general purpose (such as to inform, present, teach, and persuade), and then refine it based on the outcomes you want to achieve from your audience (Herrick, 2017, p. 168). As part of this point, it can be helpful to define the **thesis** to be sustained in the message. This means defining the perspective that will guide the presentation of the message clearly (Adler et al., 2016, p. 300).

Thesis
It is the beginning of an argumentative text presenting the central point that the presentation is going to address or demonstrate.

Audience features

At this point, there are two aspects to consider: the characteristics of the group and the situation or moment of delivery of the message. In the first case, it is important to understand the audience's interests, because people will also interpret the message with a purpose and seek to find something in your message. In large audiences, there will be many intentions waiting for your message, so you need to anticipate the range of possible expectations of your audience. For example, you can analyze the audiences' demographic differences, cultural characteristics, gender, age, and educational levels. Another aspect of the analysis is the psychological characteristics of the audience; this means specific beliefs, values, and attitudes that will frame the reception (DeVito, 2017, p. 296). Analyzing and anticipating these in preparation will allow you to expect different perspectives you will face in delivering the message. The other aspect to consider, along with the characteristics of the people who make up the audience, is the timing and circumstances of message reception (Adler et al., 2016, p. 304). This involves the availability of time for delivery, the space, and physical conditions of reception (a comfortable room, an office, workspaces, an outdoor meeting), and the expectations of the audience. This last point is crucial because it defines the emotional framework of the reception which will depend on the context in which the speech is delivered; For example, different attitudes of the audiences will be influenced if they listen to a presentation at a technical or commercial event, or in a meeting of neighbors convened by the authorities, or in a legal instance before authorities or courts.

8.4 Delivering

The delivery of a speech is the use of voice and body to communicate the message (Pearson et al., p. 340). Four possible modalities can occur in the delivery of a speech (Adler et al., p. 311):

1. **Extemporaneous mode**. This presentation mode involves thorough preparation and practice so that the message is presented spontaneously without overreliance on supporting resources. In this case, the delivery looks like a conversation, but many hours of preparation and rehearsal are behind it.
2. **Impromptu mode**. This presentation mode is spontaneous without notes, plans, or formal preparation, with simple and conversational language. In this mode, the message builds at the moment of delivery according to the conversation request. For example, a media interview or a press conference where the speaker does not know the subject of the questions in advance.
3. **Written mode**. This presentation mode is the traditional speech that a speaker reads in a particular situation. The advantage of this mode is the precision of the words. However, this mode can alienate the speaker and the message from the audience because eye contact is lost, and the intonation of the words can become monotonous.
4. **Memorized mode**. This mode is like the written speech, but the speaker learns it by heart. It is similar to written mode because the speaker follows a previously written script, respecting words and sequences. An advantage of this mode is that memorization gives the speaker more freedom in body expression. The disadvantages are that a memorized speech may not sound spontaneous, there may be a risk of forgetting, and interaction with questions or feedback may be difficult.

It is essential that each person feels comfortable with the chosen mode because, beyond the characteristics of the modality, it is the person who must express the speech fluently. Therefore, the most important factor is connecting with the audience. For example, some people can achieve that connection impromptu, others through reading a text. What is important is that the delivery meets the objectives set out in the preparation, connects with the audience, and allows the speaker to deliver the message comfortably and effectively. Each speaker must find the most effective combination, which may be to use notes, rely on personal charisma, and to use the podium to move freely. The important thing is that these resources are spontaneous and do not appear overacted or extraneous to the speaker's personality.

Non-Verbal Aspects of Delivery

Nonverbal aspects are significant in delivery because they frame the verbal expression of words and give context to intonation, body emphasis, and postural expression. These nonverbal expressions may complement the verbal delivery of the message or may contradict the verbal expression, affecting the quality and reliability of the delivery.

What is the first thing that connects with the audience? The first contact with the audience is visual. In this framework, the first aspects to take care of in the delivery are physical appearance, movement, posture, facial expression, and visual connection (Adler et al., 2017, p. 312). Let's analyze each of these points.

Appearance

This aspect refers to the outfit and physical details (such as hairstyle, glasses, and aesthetic ornaments). It is not related to a person's physical attractiveness but whether that person has prepared themselves physically to deliver a message. The first details are fundamental because they define the encounter between the speaker and the audience. The audience immediately perceives whether the person has prepared for the occasion or whether the contact with them is a routine instance with no important relevance.

Movement

This aspect expresses comfort in expressing the message. For example, the way of walking can express confidence or fear in front of the audience, nervousness, or boredom. To maintain fluid movements, the speaker should imagine their zone of movement and move freely, letting the arms follow the message, approach, and move away from the audience according to personal needs. The audience does not expect a character with perfectly planned movements; they want to see a person involved and committed to the message. This personal implication is reflected in the voice, body posture, and visual connection. In this sense, the way to control the movements is to think about the message and move according to the implications of the message. If the speaker focuses on the movements, they will look forced and fictitious.

Posture

A good posture is simply upright with a straight spine (without meaning a military position), with the feet at an angle to support the body's symmetry. Straight posture (not rigid) allows for greater concentration on the message because the body is better oxygenated and has an intermediate tension that allows for fluid movements. A good posture also allows for a better connection with the audience because you feel present, open, and attentive to the reactions and verbal and nonverbal exchanges with the audience.

Facial expression

The face is a determining means of communication because it expresses emotions and attitudes spontaneously and powerfully. When these expressions complement words, the message gains strength and credibility. However, when facial expressions contradict words, the message generates confusion and mistrust. Move your face before the presentation so that the muscles are more relaxed, avoid clenching your teeth, you can place your tongue behind the roof of your mouth in a moment of pause to relax your jaw, open your eyes to avoid frowning, and do not be afraid to smile if you need to connect with the audience.

Eye contact

Eye contact is the most powerful aspect of audience contact and is the most sensitive complement to facial expression. For the audience, your eye contact is a sign of interest in them and personal involvement in the message. As a speaker, eye contact is the most significant aspect of getting nonverbal feedback from your audience because it allows you to see what the audience gives back to you when you deliver your message. To maintain eye contact, it is important to look at an audience member directly at least once and to look around at different audience members during any presentation.

Voice

Regarding this aspect, there are three key points to consider: The first is to find a balanced pace that allows you to deliver your message without lulling the audience to sleep due to slow pace or make an unintelligible speech due to the speed. The second point is the tone of voice. Pitch responds to the vibration of your vocal cords, and the cords respond to the relaxation of your neck. If you speak fast, the pitch will rise and sound higher; but if you lower it too much, it will sound dramatic and numbing. The way to find the right pitch is to keep breathing smoothly, not rush and vary the rhythms of the speech by giving different emphases to the phrases. The third point is articulation, which defines the clarity of your pronunciation. Proper articulation implies that all words are sounded out. Incorrect articulation has nothing to do with regional intonation or the intonation of a person who is not speaking their native language. Incorrect articulation means omitting letters, substituting words, replacing words with sounds, or merging two or more words.

8.5 The Influence of Social Media

The interactivity and speed of social media have a huge impact on public communication. This section cannot explore this impact exhaustively but will highlight some influences. From the point of view of organizations or public personalities, social media influences their reputation directly. Reputation is the perception that specific audiences have of an organization or personality. This perception is based on social interactions with certain content sources. Reputation is not something an organization or personality can control; they can influence it and manage some of the impacts of public messages in its construction. This is when public presence in social media becomes strategic and significant.

In this framework, let's first analyze some characteristics that make social media unique. First, digital media and internet connectivity have led to a change in the dynamics of information as seen, for example, with the role of the sender (Shirky, 2011, p. 37). Previously, all content had to be approved by an editor according to the medium or newspaper criteria. Content created on social networks is less conditioned by editing processes; people simply express themselves, and this generates messages that are often unfounded and are based on emotional expressions of complaint or protest. Many central issues are transferred from social networks to the mainstream media, which takes them and amplifies them.

Social media has also changed the media landscape regarding content delivery, content access, participation of the recipients, and the storage and reproduction of the content (Coombs, 2014, p. 35). Other than in traditional media, there is no official voice in social media; everyone has a voice, and these characteristics have been a significant challenge for organizations and communication professionals (Freberg, 2019, p. 150). Social media has transformed the way people consume, disseminate, and engage with news and other forms of information in society (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2013, p. 497). These tools allow users to share knowledge, engage in digital storytelling through conversations and visual components, collaborate with others, and solve problems and tasks (Russmann & Svensson, 2017, p. 2).

Table 8: Social Media Characteristics

Participation	Anyone can create and give feedback on the content.
Openness	People can express themselves freely in most virtual spaces.
Conversation	It facilitates two-way interaction in real-time.
Communities	Groups with similar interests can quickly come together.
Connectivity	Extensive use of links to other content in different formats

Source: Marcelo Manucci (2022), based on Coombs (2014).

Organizational Public Speech on Social Media

According to Belch and Belch (2017), the radical changes in digital exchange create new possibilities for intervention in the public speech of the organizations :

Extend the organization's presence

The possibilities of digital public presence for an organization can help raise awareness of its specific offerings or activities. For small organizations or NGOs with limited budgets, social media offers the opportunity to reach every corner of the world with their message. Formal communication through controlled channels and informal communication through social media interaction is valuable for organizations. In large companies or organizations, social media can complement the strategy because it allows fine-tuning the message to specific audiences.

Share specific information

One of the web's main objectives is to provide detailed information; these aspects concern all public actors (organizations, social leaders, governments). Social media, in general, and corporate websites, in particular, share information about a company's products and services in great detail (texts, test videos, animated instructions). In addition, they allow organizations to document their social initiatives (photographs, testimonials, statistics) and provide contact channels and news of the company or organization itself.

Create online activities

Social media encourages the participation of people in creating content, sharing experiences, and starting new trends and habits. These possibilities can be used strategically to generate a set of activities that promote the brand or product. For example, an organization or a social personality can use social media to provide live activities (events, talks, courses), contests, and downloadable resources.

Public Speaking for Social Media

Organizations must consider a plan for a public discourse strategy according to the importance of public presence in social media. This plan must include the delivery of key messages in the networks to protect the organization's reputation, mitigate attacks against it, and create relationships with different stakeholders. In this sense, Caroll (2011) proposes five axes of messages to sustain a public discourse strategy:

1. The first axis is informative, which provides data and content on the organization's activity. This axis is important for different stakeholders to learn about corporate news from official sources. It also includes messages about social issues such as the environment, celebrations in each country, and issues on the social agenda.
2. The second axis of messages is related to corporate identity, values, mission, vision of an organization, and strategic aspirations.
3. The third axis is about positioning to show what makes the organization different, what innovations it pursues, and what defines the particularities of its proposals.
4. The fourth axis refers to corporate culture to show how the organization works, the relationship conditions, the importance of certain processes, the frame of reference for decisions, and the strategic priorities of the culture.
5. The last axis is about social responsibility, which shows the organization's commitment as a social actor concerning certain issues and commitments to society and the government.

SUMMARY

Public speech is a message created to influence an audience and generate a certain effect. Audiences can consist of large groups of people, participants of a social event, a work team, or a three-person academic tribunal. Public speeches can have two purposes: A persuasive presentation seeks to motivate the audience to action, while an informative presentation seeks to inform them.

Public speech involves the organization of symbols to produce effects or influence an audience. Therefore, it transcends and complements the verbal delivery of the message. At the same time, verbal delivery incorporates the body as a means of expression with significant influence in the context of message. Thus, planning the message, preparing the structure, the speaker's practice, and knowledge of the delivery conditions converge in the effectiveness of the force and efficacy of the result.

The first teachings on public discussion were devised in Ancient Greece, when the public space was the arena in which ideas were discussed. In our century, there is a public space, that of social media, where people

share their ideas and comments. This space is a new territory of public presence that can take the lessons of public speaking to have a coherent, reliable, and credible presence in a new space of ideas.

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