

PART IV

EDUCATION

1. METHODS OF INDIVIDUAL CREATIVITY STIMULATION

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Abstract: *The concept of communication is a notorious one but at the same time, difficult to define precisely. However, many researchers recognize a number of attributes as easy to define and interpret. In this paper we will carry out a detailed analysis of each of these components of the basic model of communication (Hargie, O., Dickson, D. 2004, Dickson, 2001, Hargie and Tourish, 1999, Dickson et al., 1997). Interpersonal communication is a transactional, intentional, multidimensional, irreversible and (possibly) inevitable process. It is strictly determined by factors such as the situational context of the person, cognitive, affective or temporal elements. The participants in the communication carry and reflect the whole personal "baggage", of which the accumulated knowledge and experiences, motives, interests, values, emotions, attitudes, expectations and personal dispositions are part. To these are added the self-image, the beliefs about one's own abilities to succeed (self-efficacy). All these elements will determine the kind of meetings planned, the objectives selected, the persistence in achieving them, as well as the anticipation of possible rewards. Effective interpersonal involvement can be interpreted in terms of concepts such as: person-context, goals, mediation processes, responses, feedback and perception. We can think of spatial, temporal, relational and sometimes organizational frameworks in which the communication process is incorporated. The personal characteristics of the participants, together with the specifics of the situation, act to model the interaction. Also, the objectives pursued are determined by personal and situational factors. The plans and strategies for their realization come from the mediation processes and the strategy adopted accordingly, is reflected in the manifested answers, in behavioral and decision choices.*

Key words: *communication, person, situational context, affectivity, cognition, feedback, mediation*

1. An initial model of interpersonal communication

In the present paper we want to explore and analyze the essential components and processes that underlie dyadic (between two people) interaction skills. In this way, we will rely on a conceptual model presented by Hargie and Tourish (1999), Hargie (1997) and Dickson et al. (1997), based on Argyle's earlier theory (1981). The aforementioned model identifies six elements of interpersonal interaction skills. These are: 1. *the person-situation context*; 2. *the purpose*; 3. *the mediation processes*; 4. *the answer*; 5. *feedback*; 6. *perception*. In the overall

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presentation, this model is based on three main hypotheses. The first is that, as already stated, people act according to a given context; secondly, they are sensitive to the effects of their action; and thirdly, they take steps to modify subsequent actions based on this information. According to the model, dyadic interaction is described in a person-situation framework. This is why, when individuals engage in communication, their particular attributes and characteristics manifest themselves strongly, which defines each individual as a unique component in the communication process, due to the parameters of the common situation in which they are.

A widely accepted feature of social activity is that it is goal oriented (Jordan, J. 1998). People set and pursue goals in the situations in which they interact. In trying to achieve the goal, the mediation processes are operationalized. Consequently, possible strategies can be formulated to achieve these results, evaluating the projected effects, the result being a decision on the action plan. The manner of implementation of this course of action will, in turn, be reflected in the answers given. The interactive nature of the communication process consists in the fact that each participant in the interaction, in reaction to the other, offers as feedback, relevant information to reach the decisions regarding the achievement of the objective. In this way, the individual has access to his own level of performance, allowing the process of self-monitoring.

Even if the feedback provides important information, they can only take action if they have been fully received by the recipient. Perception is indeed essential for a good communicative interaction. However, due to its inherently selective and subjective nature, information retrieval is faced with perceptual inaccuracy and miscommunication (Hanna and Wilson, 1998). Given these weak links of communication, the three elements: the perception of the self, the context and the interlocutor will be interpreted according to a complex of mediation processes whose result will be a plan for coordinating the action.

2. The elements of a successful communication

This action plan, considered to maximize the opportunities to achieve the objectives in the prevailing circumstances, is represented by the strategies to be carried out, thus determining individual, specific responses. To summarize and to respect the cognitive theories of interpersonal communication in general, - *"people are assumed to be actors and to have goals, ... these actors have endowed with complex mental machinery. The machinery is deployed in pursuit of those goals"* (Samp, J. and Solomon, D. 1998)²⁵⁶. Due to the dynamic and constantly changing character of the communication, both participants are, at the same time, senders and recipients of information. Each is a communicator, even when he is silent, acting or reacting to the other. It should be remembered that there are potential barriers to successful communication in each of the different stages of

²⁵⁶Samp, J. and Solomon, D. (1998). Communicative responses to problematic events in close relationships I: the variety and facets of goals, *Communication Research* 25:66-95, p.89.

the interaction (Dickson, 2001). Next, we will perform a more detailed analysis of each of these components of the model. Further information can be found in Hargie (1997), Hargie and Tourish (1999) and Dickson (2001).

3. Situational context

As we already mentioned, what happens during the interaction is due in part to the participants and the personal "baggage" they bring to the meeting. This baggage includes their knowledge, motives, values, emotions, attitudes, expectations and personal dispositions. The quality of self-perception (self-image) and the beliefs they have formed about their own abilities to succeed in various types of actions (self-efficacy) will also determine the type of meetings planned, the objectives selected, as they are pursued and rewards derived from these are anticipated. The interaction is also determined by the parameters of the situation in which the individuals are, including the requirements of the role and the related social rules. Take, for example, a teacher and his students in the classroom. Even though, each one is unique, however, the respective roles offered by this specific situation, suppose that, whoever was involved in this type of activity, it will consist in the action of the students and the teachers, at the same time and yet differentiated. The implicit rules that coordinate the conduct of the two parties, in such circumstances, will be defined by the approval of some actions and the conviction of others, regulating the ongoing interaction.

The physical setting (clothing, age, health, etc.) is an additional constraint factor of the environment that has direct effects on the interaction. The way the space is organized and decorated can exert a significant influence on the communicative process (Kaya and Erkip, 1999; Hargie, O., Dickson, D. 2004). These sources of influence are bidirectional. We do not refer only to the fact that personal characteristics and situational factors influence behavior. What transpires during social contact can also cause changes in the interaction. This can lead to changes in individual knowledge, beliefs and attitudes (indeed, the success of educational and counseling interventions depends on it) and may also limit the social situation. Thus, the participants can decide to dispense with the usual formality that characterizes certain situations, such as the selection interview, the summit meetings, etc. and turn them into a more relaxed occasion. The approach of "*walking in the woods*" as a method of "meeting and discussion" adopted by Reagan and Gorbachev, which eventually led to the end of the "Cold War", was in stark contrast to the type of official summit type that typifies international relations.

4. Personal characteristics

A complex of personal factors including knowledge, motives, personality, attitudes and emotions shape the interactive process regarding the goals pursued, the perceptions and the interaction models.

a. Knowledge. We can distinguish between what is known, on the one hand, and

the cognitive processes through which information is decoded, stored and retrieved from memory, on the other (Greene, 1995; Ryan, R. and Deci, E., 1996). The knowledge of our social world and its functioning, the people and the circumstances in which they are found, together with the common communication codes, are fundamental data in understanding any effective communication action. Having relevant information on a topic we want to present is essential to success. Each stage of the communication process must be carefully analyzed, from the identification of the objectives, through the exact identification of the sense of the situation and the actions of the other, until the selection and implementation of an action strategy. Researchers and communication specialists have used the concept of **schema** in explaining how information is organized in a particular framework, which represents the world as it is lived by the individual, using, at the same time, the interpretation of current events. A scheme can be thought of as a "mental structure that contains general expectations and knowledge of the world. This may include general expectations regarding people, social roles, events and behavior in certain situations" (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995)²⁵⁷. Different types of schemes have been identified (Fiedler, K. and Bless, H., 2001) and these include the following elements:

- **schemes of self** - they are related to the process of self-knowledge;
- **schemes of an event or scenarios** that represent the sequences specific to social occasions, frequently encountered, such as choosing a menu at the restaurant or buying a newspaper;
- **role schemes** that involve concepts according to which we expect people with a certain status to behave according to the norms required by that status;
- **causality schemes** - allow us to formulate judgments about cause-effect relationships in our physical and social environment and to adopt modes of action based on the anticipations offered by this scheme;
- **personal schemes**, facilitators - are organized knowledge sets about specific characteristics and the social classification of others.

The related category concept was also used to explain how we structure information about others and impose meaning on the social world in which we operate. Fiedler and Bless (2001) defined the category as "*grouping of two or more distinguishable objects that are treated in a similar way.*"²⁵⁸ "Party", for example, is a category you can use to group certain social events, having characteristics that distinguish them from other social events, such as lectures, concerts or public meetings. The complexity of our social worlds makes it impossible to categorize people, occasions and events. It would be almost impossible to consider that everything we encountered in life is fragmented, separate, unique and distinct, since we could not function in this way (Hartley, 1999). Therefore, the categorization of others and of our social world is inevitable.

²⁵⁷ Augoustinos, M. and Walker, I. (1995). *Social cognition*, London: Sage, p.32.

²⁵⁸Fiedler, K. and Bless, H. (2001). Social cognitio, in M. Hewstone and W. Stroebe (eds) *Introduction to social psychology* (3rd edn), Oxford: Blackwell, p. 123.

However, some people have more elaborate category systems than others to represent areas of their social life.

However, placing people in categories can have a negative side. It can lead to the application of stereotypes, whereby individual characteristics are neglected and all members of the group are unjustifiably viewed in an undifferentiated way, as sharing a generalized set of attributes (Nelson-Jones, 1988). Under these conditions, individuality suffers, and individuals or events are considered as undifferentiated. *"The cost of this type of generalization is that we fail to appreciate the completeness of the whole person, ensuring that our stereotypes sometimes lead us into judgments that are both erroneous and biased"* (Hargie, O., Dickson, D., 2004).²⁵⁹ These stereotypes can be broadly retained (social stereotypes) or can be specific to an individual (personal stereotypes). Stereotypes can also become *self-fulfilling*. If we consider all people of color to be aggressive, we can act against them in a belligerent manner and so we precipitate an aggressive reaction that confirms our stereotype.

b. The Reasons. We can consider two vital and related questions:

1. Why do people adopt certain goals that they accomplish?
2. After they have done this, why do they still behave in accordance with those goals?

The second question is probably easier to answer than the first. Objectives are adopted to contribute to both the orientation and the momentum of the interactive process and, therefore, have inherent motivational implications (Maes and Gebhardt, 2000). These have been described as factors of attraction by Carver and Scheier (2000), who continue to explain that *"people spend much of their time doing things that keep their behavior in close proximity to their goals."*²⁶⁰ Persistence towards a certain achievement is an important feature of goal-oriented behavior and this motivational effect is perhaps the one that has received the most attention from researchers. Not all objective aspirations are translated into action, as this depends on a variety of external and internal factors. These include assessments of favorable environmental circumstances, at that time, for achieving the goal, together with self-efficacy judgments (Bandura, 1997), which determines the extent to which the individuals in question believe they have the skills and resources available to succeed. Greene (1995) considered the reasons as internal responses to certain needs. Aronson (1999), in turn, believed that goals reflect broader motives. But what are these needs that determine us to set goals in directing our activities? Three constant concerns have been identified (Aronson, 1999), given the need for:

- to feel in control and to be able to predict events of which one is part;
- have a sense of belonging and of being intimately involved with others, making

²⁵⁹ Hargie Owen & David Dickson. (2004). *Skilled interpersonal communication: research, theory, and practice*. Edition: 4th. Publisher: Routledge, London, p. 193.

²⁶⁰ Carver, C. and Scheier, M. (2000). On the structure of behavioral self-regulation, in M. Boekaerts, P. Pintrich and M. Zeidner (eds) *Handbook of self-regulation*, San Diego: Academic Press, p. 70.

possible the positive appreciation from them;

- exercise mastery and display competence in one's striving, thus experiencing a sense of self-worth.

Within a broader horizon, the basic physiological needs (of food, sex, etc.), of safety, of protecting ourselves from physical injuries, often determining what we seek in our environment are included.

c. Attitudes. Our attitudes are another significant personal characteristic that has an impact on the interaction. The way these attitudes are structured and the extent to which they determine what we do are topics of continuous debate (Wilmot, W., 1995). A specific model of interpreting attitudes comprises three important levels:

1. Cognitive - knowledge or beliefs about the respective objective that can be a person, object, event or any attribute thereof;

2. Affective - how someone feels about the target, positive or negative, whether they like it or not. For some, this is the most important attribute;

3. Behavioral - is related to one's predisposition to behave in a certain way towards the target.

For example, maybe I have a special attitude towards my neighbor next door, so I think he is envious of me and is prepared to do something bad (cognitive level), which makes me dislike him (the level affective), so I will avoid his company (behavioral level). However, we note that attitudes define only a tendency to behave in a certain way depending on our attitude towards a particular object. According to the theory of the planned behavior, additional considerations are needed, such as the perception of the controlled behavior (the ease with which we feel we can perform the behavior) and the subjective norms (appreciation of the prevailing expectations regarding that behavior and our motivation to respect it) to model our intentions to behave accordingly. These intentions lead directly to a behavior in accordance with attitudes.

Therefore, in any situation, there may not be a direct correspondence between attitude and actual behavior. Attitudes interact with other personal characteristics, including motives, values, and other attitudes, along with situational forces, to influence behavior (Greene, 1995). In addition, not all attitudes are equally accessible or manifested with the same emotional force.

d. Personality - is the complex of unique characteristics of an individual that shapes the interaction with the environment and its ability to interact with oneself and others. A large number of personality traits have been identified. For example, extroversion-introversion is a dimension along which individuals may be placed, and which has implications on communicative behavior. There is some evidence that introverts tend to speak less, use breaks more frequently, engage in lower frequencies of gaze toward their partners, are less accurate in coding emotions, and prefer to interact at larger interpersonal distances. In the case of "type A" personalities - they can be defined by vocal cues. These people tend to be motivated, competitive, time conscious, impatient and aggressive. An element of hostility in this complex also predisposes to coronary heart disease. Some research

findings have suggested that this personality type has a typical, fast, uneven speech style, with short pauses and a strong, staccato voice (Hargie, O. and

e. Emotion. From what has been presented so far, it could be deduced that interactions are largely composed of automatic structures, completely rational in processing information, lacking an emotional dimension. Berger (1995) is adamant though that any attempts “*to explain the relationship between cognitive processes and social interaction give serious attention to the relationships between cognition, affect and action*”.²⁶¹ The affect is obviously central to the interpersonal life and has attracted the attention of communication researchers (Andersen and Guerrero, 1998). However, how emotion influences the functioning of physiological components, on the one hand, and social, moral, and cultural factors, on the other, is an ongoing debate issue. However, it is widely acknowledged that we cannot completely separate affective experience from knowledge. As Bless (2001) said, “*affective states have been shown to influence encoding, storage, retrieval, judgmental processes, and style of information processing.*”²⁶² These processes are, of course, highly intertwined. Hanna and Wilson (1998) identified three ways in which emotions can be involved in the communication process, namely:

1. **Emotion-motivated communication** - the behavior induced by basic emotions (e.g., one driver swears at another and acts threateningly in a road accident).
2. **Communication that expresses emotion** - provides information about the emotional state of the communicator.
3. **Communication that provokes emotion** - involves words and actions that trigger emotions in others.

f. Age. The different ages of the participants will influence their behavior and the expectations that each one has towards the other. The particular ways in which communication is used to the elderly and the issues related to inter-generational discussions have attracted considerable research interest. Older people are often subject to simplified, somewhat dominant forms of language.

g. Gender. Differences in how men and women communicate verbally and nonverbal have been well documented (Knapp and Miller, 1997). However, they should not be overvalued and should not be assumed to apply to everyone. Starting from here, we can say that women, as compared to men, usually exhibit more of these behavioral traits:

- interacts at closer interpersonal distances;
- are more tolerant of space intrusion;
- uses more visual and tactile contact;
- they smile more and are more expressive facial, gestural and vocal;
- are better at coding and decoding non-verbal messages;

²⁶¹Berger, C. (1995). A planbased approach to strategic communication, in D. Hewes (ed.) *The cognitive basis of interpersonal communication*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 163.

²⁶²Bless, H. (2001). The consequences of mood on the processing of social information, in A. Tesser and N. Schwarz (eds) *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: intraindividual processes*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, p.392.

- have a deeper knowledge of relational goals.

In summary, Argyle (1995: 87) stated that: women have a higher score on most components [other than assertiveness] of social ability; they have a much higher score on empathy and cooperation. It has been found that women offer easier rewards, have better verbal skills (are more fluent, express themselves grammatically, have accents that show education) and are more nonverbal expressive (smile much more, look more, have finer gestures). Men and women express themselves differently in language. As Hartley states (1999: 64): many women like to talk about feelings; but men do not. Many men like to talk about things, such as cars; women are not as interested in such things. Men like to talk about themselves, about their achievements; women listen to this when - as they have admitted in surveys, - they would rather not. These findings are in agreement with the work published by Knapp and Miller, (1997) who analyzed how men and women routinely respond to "problem discussions"²⁶³. When women disclose personal problems, they first expect (and tend to get from other women) a "listening ear", confirmation of their concerns and a reaction of understanding. Indeed, this type of discussion serves, in part, to strengthen interpersonal relationships between friends. However, men respond instinctively, approaching the problem again, in an attempt to solve it, by providing information or advice. The mistake, in the case of this communication, lies in the fact that men deplore the complacency in the problem of women, instead of following the steps to solve it. On the other hand, women feel that men do not listen to them enough and do not make the effort to understand their emotional state. The frustration is thus divided equally.

5. Situational factors

We will remind you that personal characteristics and situational factors work to provide a contextual background for communication. By acting together, they determine how people design social episodes, formulate their goals, give meaning to events and change patterns of behavior. Both characteristics, of the person and of the situation, may, within certain limits, be modified as a result of the interaction. Having previously identified a number of personal key characteristics, we will now turn our attention to an analysis of the situation. Several attempts have been made to delineate the essential constituents of situations (Miller et al., 1994). The simplest model is the one proposed by Pervin (1978), who indicated the following key elements of the situation/context in communication: who is involved; what happens; where the action takes place. A much more differentiated analysis of social situations, derived from extensive research, is that offered by Argyle et al. (1981), and elaborated by Hargie (1997). They identified no less than eight key characteristics of the situations in which people interact. Many of these will be recognized, however, from what has already

²⁶³Knapp, M. and Miller, G. (eds) (1997). *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (2nd ed) Thousand Oaks: Sage

been said about the personal characteristics of individuals, again emphasizing the close connection between these two dimensions. We also present, briefly, the elements identified by Argyle et al. (1981):

1. Structure of objectives. The situations have objective implications. Not only are we looking for situations that help us fulfill our purpose, but we will also encounter situations that hinder our desire.

2. Roles. In most situations, individuals act according to more or less recognized sets of expectations, centered on their social position and status.

3. Rules. Situations are governed by rules. There are often implicit provisions that govern acceptable behavior for participants. It is perfectly acceptable for two friends in a nightclub to sing, dance and shout, which would not be acceptable in the case of a lecture, which has completely different rules.

4. The repertoire of elements - refers to the range of behaviors that may be required for the situation to be addressed competently.

5. Behavioral sequences. In many situations, the interaction can take place in a fairly predictable sequence of acts from participants (people often work, in routine situations, according to scriptures, etc.).

6. Situational concepts. This includes those personal schemes, when someone has additional (specialist) knowledge and can act accordingly (e.g. a doctor at the accident site).

7. Language and speech. There are linguistic variations associated with social situations. For example, public speaking implies a sober, logical, formal style, different from the casual style of talking to a close friend.

8. The physical environment - the environmental framework, including furniture, décor, lighting, etc., often influences who speaks to whom, how you feel, how I say and how the discussion is regulated.

6. Culture - environment of interaction and intercommunication

From a broader perspective, the cultural environment is a particularly important contextualization factor. Culture is a complex ensemble of the way of life, habits, beliefs and behaviors specific to a certain group of people. The cultural and sub-cultural variables have an influence on the different characteristics of the communicative process. In turn, communication shapes culture. Therefore, the intercultural differences arise from elements much deeper than the language, comprising the **non-verbal communication mode**, but also the underlying social order, the meanings and values that shape it. When two people from radically different cultures come together, not only can they try to use different language codes to represent a shared world. The respective social worlds can only overlap marginally. Nelson-Jones, R. (1988) highlighted how concepts, such as self and relationship with each other, are quite different in China compared to Western countries. Cultural influences involve accepted values, beliefs and practices. A new field - **cultural psychology**, has at its core the discussion of the psycho-affective and behavioral specificity of different cultures (Heine & Renshaw, 2002,

Shweder, 1990). In a classic study, Pervin, L. (1978) exposed four dimensions along which a large sample of national groups could be plotted in respect of fundamental espoused values. These dimensions are:

- **power ratio** - the respect and deference displayed by those in different positions on a status hierarchy;
- **individualism-collectivism** - the extent to which one's identity is shaped by individual choices and achievements or by a feature of the collective group of which he is part;
- **avoidance of uncertainty** - the degree to which life's uncertainties can be controlled by planning and forecasting;
- **masculinity-femininity** - this has to do with the relative emphasis placed either on competitive achievement, task-centered, or through cooperation and harmonious relationships.

The European and North American cultures have a high level of individualism and a low level of power distance, while those of Latin American and Asian countries have a low level of individualism, but a high level of power distance. Ryan, R. and So, E. (1996) discussed the many ways in which these cultural dimensions influence communication. At another level, culturally prescribed norms govern the way people behave in interaction with others. These norms determine the punctuality, the interpersonal distance, the touch, the use of the gestures, the facial expressions, the way of looking - indeed, all the nonverbal codes. **Macho style**, in Hispanic cultures, for example, impose display rules that prohibit male expressions of pain. In Muslim cultures, there may be gender difficulties in reaching a male health worker, say, during a physical examination of a female patient.

7. Objectives - a specific element of human action

Some aspects of this concept have already been mentioned in connection with the reasons. Berger (1995) is of the opinion that goals are simply "*desired final states to which people turn their efforts.*"²⁶⁴ In other words, the goals we have in mind are the mental representations of the future final states that we would like to achieve. Oettingen and Gollwitzer (2001) highlighted three qualities that must be present in the behavior that pursues certain (objectives):

- **Persistence** - an action will be continued until the goal is reached (or abandoned, in exceptional circumstances).
- **The way of action** is likely to reduce the difference between the existing and the desired state and to produce a successful outcome.
- **Selectivity** - the individual is adapted to the stimuli associated with the objective, in initiating and directing the behavior.

²⁶⁴ Berger, C. (1995), op. cit. p. 143.

8. Conclusions

The ability to communicate, although not specific only to humans, has become extremely sophisticated in the case of humans, far surpassing all other species. Thus, intercommunication allows us to move beyond the events taking place at this time, we can share knowledge, beliefs and opinions about events from the distant past and we can propose development possibilities for the future. We can comment on events that take place here or elsewhere. We can talk about particular or general, about concrete or abstract. Also, interpersonal communication allows us to have meaningful contact with others by establishing, maintaining and ending relationships.

Despite its significance, communication is a well-known concept, difficult to define precisely. However, a number of attributes are easily recognized by many, if not all, researchers who have deliberated on this topic. Interpersonal communication can be thought of as a transactional, intentional, multidimensional, irreversible and (possibly) inevitable process.

Effective interpersonal involvement can be accounted for accordingly, in terms of concepts such as: context-situation, person, goals, mediation processes, responses, feedback and perception. All communications are context-related. We can think of spatial, temporal, relational and sometimes organizational frameworks in which it is incorporated. The personal characteristics of the participants together with the characteristics of the shared situation, act to model the interaction that transpires and both can be influenced, to some extent, accordingly. Also, the objectives pursued are determined by personal and situational factors. Plans and strategies for their implementation come from mediation processes and through the resulting tactics, certain explicit answers are adopted. A central premise of the presented model is that, within interactive arrangements, participants act simultaneously, in what they say and do, giving each other relevant information for decisions about the extent of goal attainment. Without such feedback, effective interaction would be impossible, but he will only gain the force of action if it is correctly and fully perceived. As we have seen, personal perception, in particular, although inherently subjective, plays an essential role in interpersonal transactions.

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