

# Managing Conflict in Relationships: Communication Skills

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## Abstract

Communication skills are the greatest achievement of all humanity [1]. Human being, as a social being, inevitably needs link to others, since it is precisely through these links that the very construction of subjectivity takes place. These links are developed thanks to communication processes of various types, levels, depths, etc. Therefore, the importance of knowledge of general elements of communicational processes is evident in order to promote healthier and more enriching links with others. However, communication is a very complex issue, where a great factor multiplicity intervene that it is important to know, by virtue of being able to manage it in a better way. In every interpersonal process, in every space in which a group of people coincide, we are in presence of a communicative process.

## Communication

Communication is a process of thoughts, feelings and emotions exchange. It would be like this, a form of human interrelation that occurs in this process, is conditioned by the place it occupies in the system of social relations.

First of all, it sets the gaze on the character – precisely – procesual of communication. Thinking communication as a process implies the recognition that it has stages, takes place in a specific time and space, and that it is not a monolithic and closed state, but a continuum in which very different situations can occur, and that – in turn – is influenced by a great diversity of factors and conditions, of various kinds. The communication process is a living phenomenon that can change, transform, be in a constant movement and, therefore, is highly complex.

Second, the focus is on the notion of exchange. This means that in the structure of the process there are different roles to play, always from an inter-influence perspective. This is an element that is evident on a daily basis:

*“what you tell me affects me and this determines my reaction to you”.*

If a person with whom we talk acts defensively, it would

be interesting to review how the communication has gone and assess whether something in the language used so far could have been aggressive. In communication nothing arises “just because”. The idea of exchange refers us to a constant flow of sending and receiving, in which everything has consequences, everything influences, each message determines. What is transmitted in this process are not only literal, clear, explicit and verbal messages: thoughts, feelings and emotions are exchanged.

In everyday life it often happens that we can be saying something in a conversation and - nevertheless - by the expressions on our face and gestural language, we can completely contradict that message that is transmitted from the verbal. Therefore, one of the main aspects in healthy communication is that there is coherence between what is said both explicitly and implicitly. Clear and direct communication is based on coherent messages where the what, how, where, why and to whom something is said are integrated. All this will be exemplified and argued little by little.

## Verbal and non-verbal communication

The communicative process must develop from the coherence between what is said and how it is said. This is one of the most effective tools in conflict management.

## Non-verbal communication

- a) **External appearance:** Others are often judged by their external appearance, especially in the first impression. Some experts claim that these first impressions are usually very accurate. This gives us a fundamental impression about those with whom we speak, regarding their sex, age, profession, relative economic position and race or culture. Physical aspect always communicates a message. Conflict occurs when what a person sees communicates a different message than what really exists.
- b) **Body movement:** The way we move. When movements are misinterpreted or controlled, they can lead to conflict.
- c) **Eye contact:** A means of communication that does not require words. The way the eyes are used can convey different meanings.
- d) **Physical contact:** Establishing or not establishing body contact is another form of non-verbal communication. There is a relationship between haptic and dominance. Those in power are likely to touch their subordinates more than they will be touched by them.
- e) **Use of personal space:** The way in which the space is used also communicates a message. The use of space has important effects on communication. If a person gets too close, we tend to back off. On the contrary, we tend to get closer to a person when we believe that a person is too distant. The concept of near or distant will operate with respect to each culture, personal space is universal.
- vi. **The threat:** Giving a person an ultimatum to change emphasizes the punishment.
- vii. **The moralizing approach:** Support your own solution with social, religious or moral authority.
- viii. **Questions out of place:** Incomplete, impersonal questions imply mistrust and provoke a reaction of defense and resistance.
- ix. **Deviation:** Showing disrespect by diverting the focus of attention to oneself.
- x. **The advice:** Tell the person how you think they should solve the situation involving lack of confidence that they are facing and solve their problems on their own. Contributes to dependency.
- xi. **Logical arguments:** Focusing on the objective aspects of the conflict and ignoring the person's emotions irritate when they are under stress because the facts are emphasized and not the feelings.
- xii. **Reassure:** Trying to smooth things over can be a hindrance if the listener tries to help but does not experience the emotions of the other. You lack empathy and can be falsely optimistic.
- xiii. **Not listening:** The most important barrier to communication. It is the basis for human relationships, it is the ability to communicate and to do so it is necessary to know how to listen; to learn to listen you have to learn to be silent.
- xiv. **Power, ideology and status:** It has been said that power tends to corrupt and that absolute power corrupts absolutely; the first thing that corrupts are human relationships. It takes a good deal of wisdom and mental health not to use power, and the status it grants, against others when in positions or situations that carry power.
- xv. **Prejudging, guessing, supposing:** Prejudging is judging ahead of time, anticipating the facts, not capturing objective reality but rather a subjective reality. The same is valid for guessing and supposing; they are also neurotic mental constructions that prevent us from "seeing" the reality of people, as they are and are in the here and now and not as they have been in the past.
- xvi. **Negative attitudes, subjectivity:** Attitudes are dispositions that we have in our reactions to people or things. When attitudes are positive they facilitate relationships. However, when they are negative, they represent a serious impediment to communication and rapprochement with people.
- xvii. **Superficiality:** It is evidenced in frivolous conversations, of inconsequential topics, television or radio programs with little educational and / or informative heat. It generates mental poverty, a psychological desolation that limits the possibilities

## Communication Barriers

- i. **Criticism:** Focusing on the negative aspects of communication induces guilt and lowers self-esteem.
- ii. **Manipulative praise:** The praise is used as a hook to try to get people to change their way of acting. Praise can be used to control or manipulate, this makes people or leads them to take offensive positions. It assumes the ability to judge and establishes a judge - judged relationship.
- iii. **Diagnosis:** Playing the emotional detective game and probing possible hidden motivations, can generate anger, rejection, threat, etc. It can undermine the confidence of the person in herself, with its possible consequences at the communicative level.
- iv. **Nicknames and sarcasm:** Denigrating the person by referring to them in negative terms generates resentment and frustration.
- v. **The order:** Telling a person what to do in an authoritarian manner assumes that judgments lack solidity and impoverishes their self-esteem.

of establishing deep relationships with a few people. It is the syndrome of a light culture.

**xviii. Routine:** life is made up of a series of repetitive circles that we live on a daily basis: a day, a week, a month, a year. Every day you have to get up, get ready to go out, have breakfast, work, eat, rest, have dinner, sleep; You have to take the children to school, go back for them, prepare the food, wash the dishes, do the laundry. However, a routine does not necessarily involve something mechanical. However, for many people, routine becomes lifeless, just like communication and human relationships: every day we live with our partner, children, clients, co-workers, etc. And, without realizing it, we lose the dimension of people, we no longer “see” them, the bond and its characteristics become invisible, and relationships with these people also deteriorate.

**xix. Deception, lie:** The lie separates people; with deception a ditch is left between people that makes them distant, distant. Even in cases where a lie is held as “psychological protection” between the deceived person and the liar, a wall is raised.

**xx. Language:** We often turn words into traps for communication, by virtue of not specifying what we want to say, the intentionality of what we say or by not asking people for greater accuracy in words.

**xxi. Fear:** It is one of the so-called “negative” feelings in human relationships, which is felt in situations when something new is about to be done or when meeting at an unusual, unknown moment. It involves diffuse anxiety and discomfort.

**xxii. Destructive criticism:** In accordance with the principle of human relations that “giving and receiving is the same,” criticism destroys both the critic and the critic. The same is valid for value judgments, that is, to judge people is to become a judge of their behavior, putting yourself above them and, consequently, valuing yourself as someone better.

**xxiii. Languages and culture:** Languages are not different ways of seeing the same thing or different ways of expressing the same reality, but different forms of reality. In other words, each language is the expression of a different reality, a vision of the world according to the culture. Hence the problem of cross-cultural communication, when one wants to translate an “objective” reality into another language and culture; at times it resembles Earthlings’ attempts to establish communication with aliens, although this seems exaggerated.

**xxiv. Believing that there is only one reality:** The same thing that we have said regarding language and culture is valid for the perception that each one has of reality.

**xxv. Rush, impatience:** We often make mistakes due to haste or impatience in human relationships. Lack of time - not

dedicating the appropriate time to our relationships - causes us to interact by carrying out our dialogues or agreements “on our knees”.

**xxvi. Communicating way:** In human relationships we lose, very often, not so much what (what we say, ask or request) but in the how (the way we use to do it). That is to say, the fault is not in what we ask, to which perhaps others will respond with pleasure if it were possible for them to do so, but in the way we ask for it. People usually react in an annoying way to the way used to communicate or ask for something, leaving aside the what.

**xxvii. Not empathizing:** There is a saying that you should not judge as long as you have not walked a kilometer with the other’s shoes. Then it is possible without meaning, but to “understand” the person in a situation. When the experience of the other’s situation is achieved, then acceptance arises

### Barriers that can Hinder the Communication Process

**a) Fear of risk:** One of those obstacles that we put before is the fear of risk. This fear of risk generally has to do with other fears, that is, we are afraid of being rejected, of becoming more vulnerable to others, of losing face, losing power, change, etc. But above all we are afraid of the responsibility that communication involves, since this implies a responsibility in the use we make of the information received.

**b) Personal barriers:** These are the interferences that start from the characteristics of the individual, from their perception, emotions, values, sensory deficiencies and bad listening or observation habits. They are the mental noise that limits our concentration and makes our perception and interpretation very selective. Some people speak in a very low tone, their culture is very limited when handling language and language, or they have difficulties with correct pronunciation, and this becomes powerful interference to carry out the communication process efficiently.

**c) Physical barriers:** A common barrier is noise, others are: physical distance, walls or static when we communicate through a device, etc. Physical barriers can be turned into positive forces through environmental control, with which the sender tries to modify the environment to influence the feelings and behavior of the receiver.

**d) Semantic barriers:** These are those that have to do with the meaning given to a word that has several meanings.

Semantics is the part of linguistic science that studies the meaning of words. Almost all communication is symbolic, that is, it uses necessary signs or symbols for certain meanings. These

symbols are the map of the territory that help us to build the mental map of ideas, but they are not the real territory, hence they must be decoded and interpreted by the receiver. The symbols with which they communicate have several limitations and one of them is the multiple meaning, since the same symbol has different meanings and if when interpreting the wrong meaning is chosen or simply different from the one that the issuer intended to convey, it can be misrepresented.

**e) Defense mechanisms:** Some personal barriers are often psychological in origin, and when they are, they are a way of masking fear of risk. In principle they are psychological protection mechanisms; however, they can adversely affect communication.

They have different degrees of awareness and elaboration as the case may be. Some expressions of these mechanisms could be:

**A. Of the one who speaks or who is expressed:**

- i. Talk half seriously, half-jokingly.
- ii. Intellectualize communication to impress others or because deep down we feel insecure.
- iii. Incompatible simultaneous messages (say something orally and with our gestures, movements, attitudes or behaviors, say the opposite).

**B. The speaker and the listener:**

- i. Pigeonhole the other and only perceive that which reaffirms the label we have placed on him.
  - ii. Passive acceptance of a message without analyzing it or trying to interpret it correctly.
  - iii. Just hear and not "listen".
  - iv. Judge and evaluate the other hastily.
- f) The filtered:** It is the manipulation of information by the sender, so that it is seen more favorably by the receiver. It involves transmitting only what you think the interlocutor wants to hear. It emerges from a lack of authenticity in the communication process.
- g) Selective perception:** Contrary to the previous one, this barrier is found in the receiver and consists of capturing only what is wanted. We interpret what we see and believe that this is reality.
- h) Emotions:** The mood, both of the sender and the receiver, is a very powerful interference that generally influences the way a message is transmitted (emotions, see tone of voice, movements, gestures), and also influences the way it is interpreted.

- i) **Code:** Not all codes are effective for all people or in all situations. When choosing one, the sender must make sure of two things: first, that the receiver handles that code, that is, that he understands it, and second, that the receiver can capture the code in the situation in which it is.
- j) **Receiver:** On many occasions, the receiver does not get the message, due to its own fault. A receiver distracted or distracted from the communicative situation will not understand the message that is being sent, although all the other elements of communication are working well.

## Open Questions, Objectives

- a) **Open and closed questions:** Open those that involve trying broader and not determined a priori, while the second correspond to those whose response is previously defined by the interlocutor (yes / no, etc.), these only pursue the knowledge of certain elements without collecting new information. Open questions call for an in-depth study of specific topics. Therefore, open questions are also known as probing questions.
- b) **Clarify:** What do you mean by saying that she is aggressive?
- c) **Challenge:** What makes you think he should replace the missing computer?
- d) **Explain:** What could happen if you are not able to agree today?
- e) **Identify interests:** What do you fear might happen if she has access to the files?
- f) **Finding Facts:** How long will it take you to be ready to deliver the training?
- g) **Seeking Opinions:** How about meeting in breaks to discuss the groups' points of view?
- h) **Consequences test:** How do you think he will react when he knows this decision?
- i) **Troubleshooting:** How have you tried to solve this problem, and what is preventing you from doing so right now?
- j) **Reinforce:** Go back to when someone offered to help you in a difficult situation. What did you learn about your ability through appreciation, and how could that person help you now?

## Techniques and Strategies for Evaluating the Communicative Plane of Conflicts

Alternative disputeresolution, these would correspond to the techniques and strategies for evaluating the communicative plane of conflicts, since they would allow communication to be made viable by virtue of a healthier management and potential solution

of the problem situation in question. Systematization elements, techniques: conciliation, negotiation, arbitration and mediation.

Evaluation is the process by which the characteristics of a certain communication process can be analyzed and valued and, based on this, influence the solution of possible errors or barriers in said process. This model is a creative synthesis of what is proposed by various authors who are part of the work references of the authors of this matter.

Thus, in the face of a conflict situation, regardless of its original nature, there is a multiplicity of reaction possibilities, either at the individual or collective level. These are some attitudes that may emerge as the conflict is accepted, avoided or denied:

- i. **Overcoming.** Its existence is recognized and there is a will to overcome it.
- ii. **Advantage.** Its existence is recognized and attempts are made to take advantage of it.
- iii. **Denial.** Acknowledging its existence is avoided.
- iv. **Evasion.** Its existence is recognized, but without the desire to confront it.
- v. **Accommodation.** Its existence is recognized, but it is chosen not to give any answer.
- vi. **Aggression.** It is fought with a hostile, violent response.

The choice of one or another modality at the beginning of the conflict and the subsequent changes in position or attitude will determine the process of the conflict and its possibilities for management or transformation.

From this, it follows that, in order to initiate an evaluation of the communicative plane of conflicts, for their management and consequent solution, the first and essential step is the recognition that a conflict situation is being experienced. Avoiding or denying the existence of a problem situation will only make the specific scenario in question even more complex.

In this sense, alternative procedures for dispute resolution or ADR (alternative dispute resolution) are registered, which constitute methods that allow the management and transformation of the conflict based on a non-adversarial conception of it. They are based on what would be the overcoming of the conflict as an attitude. There is an acknowledgment of the presence of the conflict and an attempt is made to initiate its management and solution process. Likewise, at the base of these methods is the idea that conflicts can be faced from a constructive perspective and that the traditional adjudicator model for dispute resolution is not always the best approach.

With this change, it is emphasized that we are no longer facing an alternative or minor movement in conflict resolution, but that

the ADR movement, by differing significantly in its formality and location from the decision-making procedures from power, represents an added value to the issue of conflicts and the process of their resolution.

Alternative dispute resolution procedures are methods of conflict resolution that start from a non-adversarial conception of the conflict. They are based on the principle that conflicts can be faced from a constructive perspective and that the traditional adjudicatory model for the resolution of disputes is not always the best answer.

## Conclusions

- i. **The conflict has long-term consequences:** Although conflict situations usually involve two or three people, their escalation will negatively affect the whole family, workplace or community. As the conflict escalates, more people join and are pressured to take part.
- ii. **Being aware of a conflict is an invitation to participate:** It is possible to respond without being drawn into the conflict. Not getting involved is a type of response that has consequences both for the people directly affected and for the periphery. People often, when in conflict, need to discuss their problems with bystanders.
- iii. **Participation does not mean support for any party:** What an individual does, or does not do, has an impact on the conflict. Counselors can positively influence how people respond to a conflict situation. Opportunities to think creatively about the situation and explore different options for resolution can be offered to parties in conflict.
- iv. **The one-part version is less than half the story:** Most people only express the part of the story that makes themselves look good and the other side bad. Nobody sees the full role he plays in the conflict. Conflicts must be understood within a broader context, systems and structures can contribute as much as individual perceptions and relationships.
- v. **People can solve their conflicts:** People solve their problems in most areas of their lives, both at work and at home. The most appropriate solution to conflicts comes from those who are most directly involved in it. Resolving the conflict produces confidence and skills that can be used in future situations.
- vi. **Change of mentality:** solve problems to advise effectively in conflict resolution.
- vii. **More curiosity / less judgments:** Avoid judging the parties in conflict, or wanting to judge the other.
- viii. **More facilitation / less owning the problem:** Empower the person and become someone capable of solving their problems;

help you discover what you really want, offer options on how to proceed.

- ix. **More listening / less talking:** Sometimes one can find a way out of the problem simply by speaking out loud about it.
- x. **More asking questions / less giving advice:** Just asking questions helps the person see problems differently and can help them move in positive directions.

- xi. **More focus on the person you are talking to / less on the other disputant:** Why focus on the disputant who is not present? There is no way to help that person resolve their conflicts if they are not present.

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