

## EFFECTIVENESS AND ETHICALITY OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ORGANISATION

Krystyna SKURJAT\*

\* Faculty of Security Sciences, General Tadeusz Kościuszko Military Academy of Land Forces in Wrocław  
e-mail: kskurjat@wp.pl

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### Abstract:

Communication is determined by the number and type of participants in the process. It is realised in interpersonal, group, institutional, public, mass and intercultural contexts. The paper focuses on communication as a creative and interactive process. It analyses communication in the organisation with respect to its effectiveness and taking account of its commitment to ethical values.

### Keywords:

communication, interaction, effectiveness, ethicality, culture, organisation

## INTRODUCTION

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century the term “communication” (from Latin *communio*, the feeling of contact, unity, joining) was used in the sense of “participation” or “community”. In connection with the later development of technical and social conditions of life, at present, communication means mainly “transmission” or “message”. Communications are interpreted at all the interaction levels and refer to internalised norms and behaviour patterns.

Communication, being a specific process, represents an important element of each social practice, conditions the improvement in professional competencies, triggers cultural ambitions and creates new lifestyles. As an interactive, purposeful and conscious process it defines strategies and tactics for action. Being a complex, multielement and multiphase, bilateral or unilateral, verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect process, it serves the purpose of preparing and carrying out effectively the cooperation between individuals, social groups or cultures. As it is a multidirectional and transac-

tional process, during communication the interaction participants contribute to and define their own identity and the identity of others.

Lie, ill will, calculation, blackmail, manipulation or denouncement are the examples of mean and wicked behaviour, contrary to the requirements of ethical communication in relations between individuals and teams in the organisations. Also categorisation, polarisation, generalisation, projection and petrification, being the instances of stereotyped behaviour, form the source of errors in perception, both in its content dimension, corresponding to the idea or message of the communication, and in its relational dimension, concerning the determination of relationships between the communicating parties.

Interpersonal communication is conducive to building trust and the unity of purpose. It makes it also possible to control and manipulate behaviour. It has to be analysed with respect to its effectiveness and taking account of its commitment to ethical values.

### 1. CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE ORGANISATION

The assessment of efficiency – as efficacy, productivity and cost-effectiveness – in the case of manufacturing products that have commercial or bartering values is based on specifications adopted “through relativisation”, which is to ensure “that the values of the products of both compared activities represent the values in the same respects and, similarly, that in both cases the matched deficiencies are of the same type”<sup>1</sup>. The value of tangible products of manufacturing and economic activity is measurable relatively easily with respect to labour productivity and efficient utilisation of resources.

However, the effectiveness/economy of communication is more difficult to explain, because this process is a phenomenon determined by not only the physical form of articulation, but also by the cultural context consisting of knowledge, experience, values, norms, meanings and attitude to tradition or time. Furthermore, for assessing the effectiveness of communication interactions different sets of concepts and diverse scales for evaluating such actions are employed. “Each approach has its own merit in calling attention to one problem or another in the field and illuminating it in some way. Fortunately, therefore, no one theoretical orientation is definitive or totally accepted by everyone. This plurality of viewpoints keeps the field lively and ensures that no single theoretical paradigm dominates it to the exclusion of all others”<sup>2</sup>.

From among all the components of the communication process the most important ones include who, when, where and for what purpose addresses whom.

The efficacy of acts of communication, i.e. the degree to which the tasks set by the creator are fulfilled, depends to a considerable extent on whether the author of the communication is well aware of his/her own intentions, thoughts and feelings, and whether his/her perception of the addressee is correct. It is worth noting that in the process of negotiations between individuals/teams different worlds of values, judge-

<sup>1</sup> T. Kotarbiński, *Traktat o dobrej robocie*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków- Gdańsk 1981, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. R. Wright, *Mass Communication. A Sociological Perspective*, Random House, New York 1986, p. 24.

ments and emotions come into play. Therefore, the originator – being the source of information – should take care to ensure that his/her message is precise enough and, depending on the recipient's response, modified, because cognitive, technical and situational capabilities, and even the subconscious, affect the sensitivity with which the recipient responds to the originator's messages and influence the recipient's way of thinking, emotions and behaviour. The above should be remembered, particularly because of the growing importance of communicating with the use of symbols, linguistic metaphors or systems of knowledge, representing the sophisticated communication, the increasing complexity of which results from the social and cultural development. It should be noted that the quality of communication is demonstrated mainly by the possibilities of building closer bonds and eliminating from the process of communication these elements which lead to perturbations in interpersonal relations.

Interpersonal communication is realised at three levels: phatic, instrumental and affective.

The first (phatic) level can be described as a casual conversation between people who do not know each other very well and are not orientated on exerting a mutual influence.

At the instrumental level people are concentrated on working out a consensus, since their views and attitudes are fundamentally different.

Communication at the effective level takes place when the communicating parties become involved in the processes of getting to know and understanding each other more thoroughly.

Efficient communication activates biological, psychological and social mechanisms of human behaviour. Being the accurate control of information exchange it is based on the typical use of language and invokes the knowledge of the natural world and the human world.

For communication to be effective it is necessary to apply the principles and rules for analysing the informational content of the communication, the art of reasoning, sub-text messages in the dialogue, the art of argumentation, persuasion, manipulation tactics and the rules for explaining non-verbal messages<sup>3</sup>. There is a wealth of them. In this paper only some of them will be discussed. Communication-related activities will be contemplated with regard to their usefulness in the processes of building and developing an organisation.

Communication in the enterprise, being "a complex, multilayer and dynamic process through which meanings are exchanged"<sup>4</sup>, is a type of persuasive behaviour. In accordance with J. L. Austin's theory, words not only interpret and explain, but also create the world by producing real consequences for it. Consequences represent this type of changes which are prevalent for a longer period and open up the possibilities for the

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<sup>3</sup> M. Tokarz, *Argumentacja. Perswazja. Manipulacja*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2006, p. 57-87.

<sup>4</sup> N. J. Adler, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior*, Kent Pub. Comp., Boston 1986, p. 51.

efficient fulfilment of subsequent objectives. In this case objectives include the aspirations and needs of individuals and teams.

Negotiations, understood as parleying or bargaining, affect the relations in the bidirectional process of exercising influence between individuals/teams representing the organisation and its social environment. The level of mutual adaptation of the bargaining parties depends on the efficacy of persuasive communication and aims mainly at working out solutions that neither of the parties could produce on its own. For persuasion, being “a complex process of human interaction, in which the persuader is linked to the persuadee through the system of verbal and nonverbal symbols, used by the persuader to influence the persuadee in order to change the persuadee’s responses”<sup>5</sup>, to fulfil its purpose, it has to be taken into account that the most important aspects of negotiations include the mutual dependence of the parties, difference of interests, opportunistic behaviour, sincerity dilemmas and trust dilemmas.

Furthermore, there are numerous defensive responses, such as evaluation, judgement, manipulations, deceit and demonstrating advantage and excessive self-confidence. If a party wants to maintain contacts, evaluation has to be replaced with an accurate diagnosis and description of the situation and excessive control, being a too meticulous examination, with a competent and creative resolution of contentious issues. Taking into account cooperation over a longer time and prospects for future benefits it can be concluded that integrative negotiations prove most advantageous, being oriented to cooperation and mutual benefits and compliant with the win-win principle.

Urging, inducing and persuasive communication occur in a specific context and should result in changes; in this case – working out an agreement and reaching compromise. Therefore, under the conditions where one party heads towards confrontation and relies in its actions on the win-lose strategy, thus taking actions destructive to the opposing party, the latter should adopt measures that guarantee not only efficiency, but also effectiveness in counteracting such actions.

The terms “effectiveness” and “counter-effectiveness” have been used here in the meaning ascribed to them by T. Kotarbiński: “Generally speaking, an agent acted effectively if by exerting himself he attained what he wished to achieve owing to such exertion, and he acted counter-effectively if by making his efforts he did not attain what he wanted to achieve and in particular if something contrary to what he wished to achieve occurred. Is it needless to add that any counter-effective action is by nature ineffective, but not vice versa? Perhaps, however, it would be worthwhile to ponder also upon this dependence. Namely, when was an action *ineffective*? Obviously, always and only when a man exerted himself to attain his objective, but this objective was not attained: no matter whether it did not happen as planned or even it happened not as planned, or finally, what happened was directly contrary, either because of the agent’s efforts or despite the agent’s efforts, which in this case were, so to say, irrelevant. In the situations of the former type non-effectiveness is combined with counter-

<sup>5</sup> V. O’Donnell and J. Knabe, *Persuasion: An interactive Dependency Approach*, Random House, New York 1982, p. 9.

effectiveness, whereas in the latter ones the action is merely and only ineffective. The action is still ineffective even if after a deliberate action of an agent, what he wanted to attain deliberately happened by chance”<sup>6</sup>.

It is worth using the reasoning of a praxeologist in situations where the opponent emphasises excessively his “points of resistance”. In such circumstances the following things matter:

- knowledge relevant for the subject matter of the dispute under specific circumstances;
- ability to convince the opposing party that the costs incurred by such party due to breaking the agreement will be high;
- strengthening of the opposing party’s feeling of responsibility for the consequences of breaking off the negotiations;
- pointing at the interdependence of both parties in the process of resolving difficult issues;
- adaptation of the verbal message to the negotiators’ perceptive abilities, status and social roles;
- in the case of strong opposition it is worth looking for an alternative settlement, outside the scope of the negotiations;
- negotiators’ personal traits are important: competences, composure, credibility, assertiveness, ability to implement creative solutions, courage to express one’s views clearly and unambiguously, apt assessment of one’s own capabilities and deficiencies, ability to cooperate with a team, ability to calculate the risk, strong personality guaranteeing that the work will be done efficiently under time pressure and stress;
- it is also essential to be able to concentrate on the big picture, to disagree constructively and to argue properly, but not excessively, to take into account different points of view and to seek opinions on them, and to give feedback;
- it is worth emphasising that the negotiators’ main faults are naivety, excessive obedience, reluctance to take on challenges as well as propensity to subordinate other people/teams and aggressiveness;
- It is not advisable to negotiate in situations where the risk of losses is too high and when the opposing party rejects all proposals for resolving contentious issues, concentrates solely on the actions profitable for such party and employs methods which are unacceptable, as they are contrary to moral principles;
- It is worth adding that among cognitive positions that focus on the significance of integrative negotiations and the method of persuasion, two of them stand out;

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<sup>6</sup> T. Kotarbiński, op. cit., p. 372-373.

- the position analysing problems from the perspective of the theory of conflicts, which, consequently, emphasises the importance of the effectiveness of action in crisis situations;
- the position favouring the practical approach, based on the constant and vigilant monitoring and resolving of specific problems, while adhering to moral norms.

The level of effectiveness of any action is measured by the extent to which the objective has been attained. And since improvements usually occur as a response to challenges and threats, they appear as a rule in the conditions of struggle, understood not only as a tool for gaining advantage over the adversary, but also as a number of activities aimed at preventing the evil or counteracting it. Therefore, “Masters of the art of warfare, connoisseurs of the lawyer’s winning tactics and superb chess players aware of their artistry were able to observe, each in their own domain, a number of tricks, subterfuges or stratagems providential when in need. In many cases all that is left to be done is to sufficiently generalise the formula of such method to obtain a legitimate directive of a general theory of struggle or – by a further-reaching generalisation – a legitimate directive for a skilful action, a general directive for efficient work”<sup>7</sup>.

Thereupon, examples of effective tactics should be given. Their effectiveness was not necessarily paralleled by ethicality, however it always stemmed from courage and led to profound (positive or negative) consequences. The examples of such principles of action are given below:

- “Strategic advantage consists in controlling the tactical imbalance of forces in order to gain benefits (...). If you know the enemy’s real strength, be prepared for battle. If the enemy have superior strength, evade them”<sup>8</sup>;
- “Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected”<sup>9</sup>;
- “The skilful fighter forces others to take action, but does not allow anyone to force him to do anything”<sup>10</sup>;

Furthermore, N. Machiavelli in *The Prince* and T. Kotarbiński in *Traktat o dobrej robocie* pointed to the effectiveness of behaviours consisting in:

- magnifying difficulties to hinder or prevent the enemy’s action;
- using skilfully the other party’s resources for one’s own purposes;
- making use of stratagems or ruses to prevent the other party from acting;
- preparing resources in time and using them effectively when needed;
- counteracting the adversary’s gathering of his forces;

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem., p. 301.

<sup>8</sup> Sun Tzu, *Sztuka wojny*, [in:] *Sun Tzu, Sun Pin, Sztuka wojny*, trans. from English D. Bakalarz, Helion, Gliwice 2008, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem., p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem., p. 44.

- struggling effectively, by immobilising/blocking the opponent’s “managing bodies”<sup>11</sup>;
- releasing immediately one’s reserves and “functionally equivalent elements” lost in the struggle;
- using the principle of “faits accomplis”, because the one who has occupied the convenient position has only to defend it, which is less costly than attacking;
- separating the enemy’s forces in accordance with the principle *Divide et Impera* (Divide and Rule);
- ensuring the freedom of movement, “even at the expense of material loss”;
- informing about “one’s own moves”, as a result of which “the adversary will find himself in the situation with only one way out”;
- making use of the so-called paradox of retreat; it is effective as it is the one who retreats “who determines the direction – and, occasionally, the speed – of the pursuit, and if he knows how to avail himself of that fact he can ensnare his pursuer.”

The examples given above form “a set of justified directives for struggle techniques”, as written by T. Kotarbiński, “which should by no means be understood as our recommendation for using all of them. What is good from the praxeological point of view can be condemnable, for example, from the point of view of honesty. It is important, however, to understand all kinds of such stratagems to avoid being caught by surprise and defeated by someone who chose to resort to all of them without discrimination”<sup>12</sup>.

The presentation of the above methods of action is meant to debunk the cunning ruses used to gain advantage. It is a warning against dishonest partners who, in relations with other entities, treat their own effectiveness as a superior value.

Effective behaviours and ethical behaviours in business activity in principle concern the relations between the organisation and its stakeholders. Furthermore, they apply to the man himself as a being creating new values while cooperating and competing with other men. The following pattern has been observed “The higher is the level of the given society’s general ethics, the higher is the level of professional ethics, and business ethics in particular. (...) Business ethics is a component of business culture, which, in turn, derives from the overall culture”<sup>13</sup>. One can only agree with this opinion. Like with the statement that the rationality of managing professional groups consists in using skilfully their intellectual potential, emotional commitment and diligence in performing work.

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<sup>11</sup> T. Kotarbiński, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 222.

<sup>13</sup> W. Gasparski, *Wykłady z etyki biznesu*, Wydawnictwo WSZiP, Warszawa 2007, p. 24.

## 2. REQUIREMENTS FOR ETHICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ORGANISATION

While the effectiveness of actions and the economical use of resources determine the technical merits of work, moral values form their “superstructure” and specify under what conditions the man can be satisfied with his efforts and how he can fulfil his aspirations as the creator of the world of cultural values. Moral values belong undoubtedly to cultural assets. Ethics focuses mainly on the good. It teaches how to develop a moral attitude in such important fields as the sphere of individual ethics and the area of voluntary obligations. The man’s ethical stability /ethicality/ is a predisposition that requires making the right choices of values and principles and being able to follow them consistently.

In accordance with P. Ulrich’s social economy the moral principles take precedence over the effectiveness of work as “Each action or institution is rational in the social and economic sense if free and mature citizens, through the process of rational discussion (*deliberation*), can reach a consensus regarding a legitimate way of creating values”<sup>14</sup>. The man, as an entity responsible for his choices, refers to cultural patterns and social norms, which are the important elements of “programming”<sup>15</sup> of the consciousness and emotionality of people – contributors to and participants of culture circles.

Since the times of the ancient Greece in the logocentric European culture the rationality and ethicality of communication rank high in the hierarchy of the goods. Below there are ten principles of “the honour code of the rights and obligations of a rational debater”<sup>16</sup> – negotiator, participant in the processes of communicating in the organisation:

- a) The participants of negotiations (individuals/teams) do not restrict the opponent’s freedom to present his views and objections;
- b) The party which makes an assertion is obliged to support it. The burden of proof (*onus probandi*) rests with the party making the assertion;
- c) The party’s action should target precisely the opponent’s assertion. The party may not add implications that are missing (in the literal meaning) in the other party’s statement and direct – covertly – attention to other additional assertions that have not been made by the opponent;
- d) The assertion can be defended solely by arguments and evidence. It is prohibited to use, for example, *ad hominem* arguments as aiming to demonstrate the interlocutor’s “defects” and, thus, undermine his credibility;
- e) Nobility in mutual relations is expressed – in the case of using an allusion, irony or metaphor – in conceding to those who interpret them correctly. It

<sup>14</sup> P. Ulrich, *Integrative Economic Ethics – Towards a Conception of Socio – Economic Rationality*, [in:] *Contemporary Economic Ethics and Business Ethics*. Ed. P. Koslowski, Berlin 2000, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> G. Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences. International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Sage, Beverly-Hills-London- New Delhi 1984, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> M. Tokarz, op. cit., p. 164.



involves also refraining from over interpretation with regard to statements made by the opposing party;

- f) Parties do not use false assertions and do not reject the statements previously accepted by way of mutual agreement;
- g) The parties assume that only the position which has been sufficiently justified can be finally considered defended;
- h) Only the arguments based on logical premises can be used in discussion;
- i) The party which presented the position that could not be sufficiently justified should withdraw from such position. Also the criticising party whose arguments were too weak should take back its objections raised with regard to the opponent;
- j) The parties should present their arguments clearly and precisely and interpret the opposing party's position honestly, in accordance with the intentions of such party.

To achieve effective communication it is necessary to know the moral principles, which perform the fundamental role in the social life. It is worth knowing and considering them to be able to proficiently oppose lies, ill will, calculation, blackmail, manipulation or denouncement, which represent the behaviours that destroy credibility and trust in interpersonal relations.

Among cognitive deformations mainly categorisation, polarisation, generalisation, projection and petrification, being the ways of thinking which deviate from the principles of formal correctness, encourage reflection.

Categorisation is a process in which cognition is based on bias and on blocking new information that would make the overview more complex. This way of conduct, which involves a "specific economy" of thinking, "compares" given categories or groups of people to an abstract model and – in the case where at least one common feature is found in the object and in the model – ascribes to the object all other very detailed properties. In this way categorisation omits the features principally differing a given group from the model. Apart from excessive simplifications and the misguided attribution to the object of the characteristics that such object does not possess in reality, there is a risk of false categorisation, in which employees, both individuals and teams, are evaluated contrary to the facts. Categorisation not only deforms, but also produces cognitive deformations. Despite all that it is widely used. However, it comes at an unavoidable cost, resulting from the use of "shortcuts" to save energy and time.

Polarisation is the way of thinking in which reality is perceived in only two colours: "black" or "white". The drawing of so distinct boundaries is intended to separate individuals and social groups from each other, so that the well-defined divisions could prevent the undermining of the order imposed by people. The black and white division between good and evil falsifies the reality, because the prevailing number of differences important for the social life do not exist "by nature", but they always represent an attempt at imposing an artificial order on the reality. Disregarding and bypassing ambiguities leads to such overview which, instead of allowing for the gradation of cer-



tain features and the perception of a large area of “grey” in the social life, creates an artificial opposition so as not to blur the demarcation lines between people of different importance and performing different social roles.

Generalisation is a fundamental attributive error and consists in perceiving an individual/group in a simplified way. This way of perceiving an “object” usually refers to “commonly held opinions”, “experts’ opinions” or “common sense” and neglects such perspective that does not fit the strategy of one-sided perception of the object. Furthermore, generalisation, as a biased attitude, magnifies or considerably reduces the value and significance of individuals/teams, depending on the cognising agent’s personal – positive or negative – attitude to them. Moreover, this way of thinking – illegitimately – ascribes to the object the remaining positive or negative properties which in a commonly shared perception are usually attributed to this group of “objects”. Generalisation appeals to imagination and minimises a cognitive effort. The crassness of judgement is the price to be paid for it.

Projection is a pattern of thought in which the cognising agent, while formulating opinions about another man/community, refers to his own characteristics and feelings and ascribes them to the “object”. This deformation results from putting an equation mark between the pseudo-data – which is the right name for the false premises – and the observer’s knowledge about the partner’s real behaviours. This type of deformation of thought arises from “the laws governing the functioning of knowledge structures – using these structures to acquire and understand new information and recollect old information. As it is impossible to use these structures without abusing them at least from time to time, the illusions resulting from the use of pseudo-data not only enable us to live, but in a way they are also the inevitable consequence of living, of our mind’s life”<sup>17</sup>. In the situation where people lack verified knowledge they quite often assume that other people are similar to them.

Petrification is the setting into a fixed shape, fossilisation, consolidation of something. It is a tendency to weaken the chances of potential rivals, as a result of attributing to them invariable attitudes, incompatible with new situations. The tendency to perceive individuals/teams in the way considered final by the cognising agent leads to a failure in noticing changes that these “objects” undergo. Such simplified approach to people and social facts results from the need to impose a social order in the world and it is always common sense thinking, which is only apparently obvious and only apparently true.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research on mechanisms of interpersonal communication concerns mainly the content and way of imparting information, development of a communication situation, intentionality of verbal messages, recipient’s effectiveness in apprehending messages, physical conditions under which a specific act of communicating takes place, ways of attaching meaning to messages, debaters’ competence in filling gaps in conversation

<sup>17</sup> B. Wojciszke, *Dane i pseudodane w procesie spostrzegania ludzi*, [in:] *Złudzenia, które pozwalają żyć*. Redakcja naukowa M. Kofta, T. Szustrowa, PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 89.

and – according to H. P. Grice's theory – skilful, which in this case means rational, use of the principles of veracity, informativeness, matter-of-factness and organisation in the process of communication.

Communication behaviours in a company, on which this paper focuses, should be characterised by creativity and independence, but also by the employees' ability to adapt to and absorb the new organisational culture which is based on knowledge, and, consequently, requires its participants to proficiently use numerous communication channels. In the post-industrial civilisation a high social status of specialists results from the society's approval for scientific knowledge. This culture values the ability to communicate effectively, on the basis of the truth and, thus, ethically. Mutually complementing conditions that encourage the reconciliation of attitudes, values and skills and appropriate methods for managing communication processes are conducive to the development of an organisation. And, primarily, they provide the opportunity to make choices not only based on personal profits and losses, but ensuring that in the process of human work the interpersonal relations are oriented to pass on what is good for the other man. Such behaviours are the sources of all kinds of morality.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

**Krystyna SKURJAT**, Ph.D., Sc.D., employee of the Military Academy of Land Forces in Wrocław, Faculty of Security Science, Department of Humanities. Author of seven monographs and 180 other publications on professional ethics, theory of communication, philosophy, social psychology and didactics.

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