│ CHAPTER 2 │

Basic Principles of Communication

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to review the concept, meaning, and content elements of communication. The function, characteristics, and main principles of communication are all important for the successful interaction with children and young people and for a better understanding of their communication messages. One of the most important basic principles of communication is that it is impossible not to communicate. Professionals and representatives of authorities send messages to minors who come into contact with, even if adults and experts do not otherwise express themselves verbally. When working with children, it is important to bear this in mind not only to ensure more effective interaction, but also because the child's behaviour will be a response to the messages sent by professionals through non-verbal channels. Creating an atmosphere of trust is an important prerequisite for effective action, regardless of the type of official procedure or role involved. It is also a prerequisite and guarantee for the wider enforcement of children's rights.

KEYWORDS

concept of communication, meaning and content of communication, basic principles of communication

Good communication is the alpha and omega of dealing with minors. Without the exchange of information, the transmission/reception of messages in the right language and on the right platform, and without adequate interpretation, a good program, initiative or action will lose its power.

1. Definition and Function of Communication

The Latin words for communication are communis/e (common, general), communio/nis (community) and communico/are (to communicate, to make common, to share). Accordingly, communication means the transfer of information from one place to another, as well as the exchange of messages between two or more people in a mutually intelligible symbol system. The important elements of this process are message, encoding/decoding, interaction and feedback.

However, the meaning of the word also includes, in addition to the activity of communication, the news, transmission, notification, publication, contact, connection, liaison. The prefix 'co' refers to the communal nature of the activity, i.e. that several people are involved. The word "communico" can be translated into English for example as make common, share, discuss, etc.[1]

Communication is therefore undoubtedly a way or tool of sharing information. But in fact it is more than that. From the individual's point of view, it serves self-expression, self-definition, by sharing with the outside world one's feelings, emotions and thoughts about different things (e.g. I do not behave like you).

Another aspect is when an individual wants to influence, change or shape his/her environment by communicating (e.g.: what you are doing is wrong, do this instead).

But the other direction of interaction between the individual and society also plays an important role. In this case, the message is sent by the society to the individual, who is then able to recognise and understand his/her own environment and learn the rules of his/her own socio-cultural environment.

The word "culture" itself is rooted in the Latin "colore", which originally meant the cultivation and care of the land. Cicero first used it in a similar sense in his book written around 45 BC, when he defined philosophy as the cultivation of the soul[2].

In the broadest sense, culture is the sum of all the knowledge and experience in a given society that serves the cohesion and survival of society as a human community.

Communication enables individuals to acquire knowledge of the social and cultural factors of their wider environment beyond language, and of the laws and functioning of these factors, and to interact with the people around them. In this process, one's own and immediate environment, the education of one's family, one's role in the social hierarchy, position in the labour market, living environment, subcultural traditions, customs, etc. will have as much influence as the national memory and attitudes of the country concerned. As will be discussed later, the role of the media as a source of values and models for learning and teaching is increasingly prominent, regardless of the age or social context.

So the communication is the medium through which the elements of culture can be shared with a given community of individuals, and the knowledge base for the survival of a given society can be transferred.

Effective communication requires knowledge of the basic principles of communication.
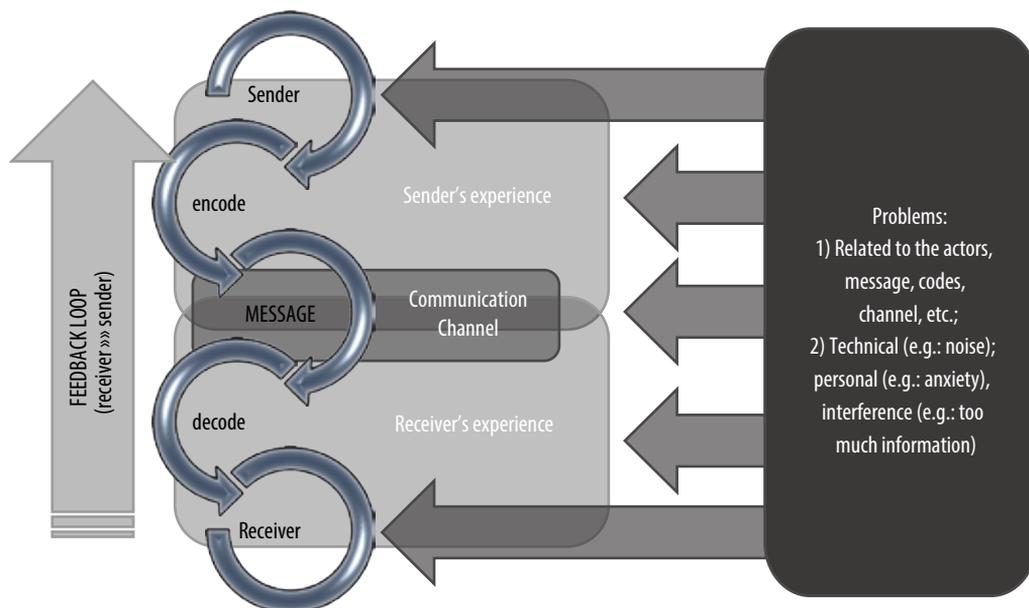
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1 For more details see: Hegyi, Szabó and Szabó, 2013.
2 Kondor, 2003, pp. 338–444.

2. Human Communication – Elements and Process

All *human communication is a process* in which human factors – sender (encoder) and receiver (decoder) – and other factors – such as the concrete communication channel and noise – play a significant role.

Figure 1. Elements of the communication process[3]

Since the two most important actors in the communication process are human beings themselves, their actual mental state, level of concentration, cultural and social background, psychological protocol, life experience, etc. all influence whether the message is actually sent – and received – in the content and form intended by the sender. This is also true for feedback[4].

In *real-time communication*, even if it takes place via electronic devices, both parties can appear simultaneously as senders and receivers of messages. In such cases, the process consists of intense, pulsating, reciprocal actions and reactions, where the decisions and behaviour of participants are significantly influenced by the messages of the other party.

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3 Author's own work: The typology of the communication problems see more: Korpics, 2013.
4 See more details: Abey, 2025.

3. Main Principles of Communication

The most significant laws of communication stem precisely from the existence of human actors in the process. However, it is important to note that these principles may vary depending on how restrictive the communication channel is (for example in case of 'SMS', in connection with the perceptibility of non-verbal messages) or if the communication is not real-time (for example, electronic correspondence).

One of the most important principles of interpersonal communication is that *you cannot not communicate*. In addition to verbal communication, which – typically – accounts for around 20% of all messages, *non-verbal communication plays* a major role. The importance of the latter is paramount, since in the event of a conflict between the content of the messages sent through the two communication channels, it is the latter one that is "believed" by the receiver.

The absence of verbal communication does not mean that the other party present in the interpersonal environment, such as the representative of the authority, does not form an opinion on the basis of the young person's non-verbal signals. In this context the importance of 'unconscious' or semi-conscious communication is similar to the importance of techniques used during the conscious communication activities.

This is important both for minors and for the representatives of the authorities. In the case of 'unconscious' communication, body language operates in a biologically coded way that exists independently of the child's will, whereas in the case of semi-conscious communication, spontaneous reactions and body language messages can be controlled with appropriate focus.

It is also an important axiom that the perspective of the two parties in the communication relationship is strongly influenced by their own situation. Individuals relate their own behaviour in communication to the behaviour of the other party. Thus, all verbal and non-verbal messages from the young person are also a reaction to the 'action' of the authority's representative. Given that the relationship is characterised by a number of forms of subordination in addition to age, the extent to which the professionals' manifestations and metacommunications are of a different nature is even more important.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that interpersonal communication cannot be replaced by other means, especially when minors are involved in the process. Even in the case of young people who come into contact with child protection or child welfare services, it is true that by the time they meet with support professionals, they have already had to face a number of negative experiences and traumatic

events[5], partly due to inadequate communication on the part of adult society and professionals[6].

For them, an inappropriate choice of communication channel, the fragmented attention of the communication partner, and other disruptive circumstances (such as the presence of several people in the room) send the message that the professional or authority is not really interested in what has happened to them, so they ultimately choose complete passivity in the communication process and in their cooperation with the authorities. Their disappointment in adult society, professionals, and authorities can be associated with a serious loss of trust and hopelessness, causing them to feel alone and helpless[7]. Unfortunately *the principle of "I cannot not communicate" is often ignored by adults in their everyday work.* However, due to their psychological vulnerability resulting from past traumas and the associated mental challenges, the affected minors have difficulty finding their place in the communication process even without these negative experiences[8].

4. Specific Principles of Multicolored Communication

There are countless types of communication. Depending on the type, each type of communication has its own specific rules and principles. Among the elements of the communication process, the two most important ones, for example, are the sender and the receiver of the message, who, due to their *human nature*, may react very differently in a specific interaction, even under identical objective conditions.

For example, the fact that they have a certain attitude towards their own role can strongly influence their behaviour. A boss, when arguing with a subordinate or dealing with a workplace problem, may react differently[9] depending on what they think about managerial authority, about where their decision-making power and (even limited) power over others comes from. They will react very differently to a subordinate's wrong decision if they believe that sanctions and various types of punishment, even informal ones, ensure the respect of their subordinates, or if they believe that rewards are the means to achieve this.

The content of their communication is punitive in nature, and accordingly, the purpose of the associated non-verbal messages is to intensify the negative effect; in

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5 The root cause of traumatic experiences and victimization is often peer bullying, which has a strong impact, especially in the online space. Due to the inadequate attention and lack of reactions from adult society, the young person becomes completely lost. About the phenomenon and its consequences. See e.g.: Váradi-Csema, 2025, pp. 53–73.

6 See e.g. Leinonen et al., 2023, pp. 339–356.

7 And in his/her final desperation, he/she turns to social media users with a final cry for help, as several children who have committed cyber suicide have done - but the support has not been forthcoming. See e.g.: Csemáné Váradi, 2021, pp. 95–112.

8 World Health Organization, 2010.

9 Holland, 2012

the second case, it appears as a neutral communication, free of negative emotions, about the fact that the subordinate cannot receive a reward because of their mistake.

Of course, there are other types of leaders who see the source of their power over their subordinates in the legal and other regulations associated with their position; in their own outstanding expertise, their greater domestic and international experience compared to their subordinates, and their proficiency in their field; their personal attitude, seniority, consistently fair and caring behaviour, genuine team spirit, and positive personality.

Communication has different characteristics – and regularities – when actors appear as part of a *specific subculture*. This can be the *internal world of an organization or institution,* which is significantly influenced by the activities they carry out. The internal protocol of a law enforcement agency and the relationships between its employees can be described in very different terms than those of a manufacturing company, an institution active in the financial sector, or a research institute.

The *specific characteristics of internal communication processes* are also influenced by whether, for example, the organization's *human resources policy applies methods* that also address the communication priorities of its employees. Numerous studies[10] have confirmed that if an organization is willing to invest money and time in getting to know its employees' work styles, typical problem-solving communication techniques (e.g., the DiSC personality model), it makes cooperation between employees more effective, reduces conflict, and thus improves the workplace atmosphere. This, in turn, leads to increased productivity, both directly and indirectly. This is an important consideration for any organization or institution.

Of course, the specific characteristics of communication may be influenced by other characteristics of the *parties involved* (e.g., age, cultural background); the size of the *group of people involved* in the communication (e.g., community, national, international); the *purpose of the communication* (e.g., supporting the exercise of rights, enforcing rights guaranteed by law, early detection of problems, preventive intervention, reducing the negative after-effects of an event); the *nature of the communication channel* used (e.g., mass media with a traditional technical base, information and communication technologies).

These issues will be discussed separately in the following chapters.

At the same time, the *specific external environment or internal events* in which communication takes place can be an equally important influencing factor, as it affects not only the circle of human actors and other characteristics of the communication process, but also the group of people who are affected, even indirectly, by the content of the communication.

An example of this could be an organisational crisis. In such cases, the institutions themselves may suffer a serious loss of trust among members of society. Therefore, communication has its own specific laws in addition to the general ones, as its purpose is no longer just to share information, but also, for example, to restore trust.

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10 See e.g.: Sugerman, 2009.

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An inadequately handled problem can have countless negative consequences. In any organization or institution – whether it belongs to child protection, the justice system, or the social sphere – there may be cases or (operational) disruptions where proactive communication is important. This can not only help minimize negative effects, but also – for example, by providing accurate information to those affected – can be effective in addressing concerns or maintaining trust.

Effective crisis communication[11] plays a vital role in managing these challenges and minimizing negative impacts. Through proactive interaction with stakeholders, organizations can provide accurate information, address concerns, and maintain trust, which is essential to their survival and long-term success.

Crisis communication operates according to specific rules in such situations, as the main elements of interaction are Communication, Comprehension, Coordination, Collaboration, and Confirmation.

In order to achieve its goal, crisis communication consists of several interrelated sub-activities: establishing a crisis management team, with clearly defined tasks and assigned responsibilities; centralizing crisis communication activities; stipulating that only certain individuals may make statements or share information on a given issue; strictly enforcing these rules, with the prospect of negative consequences ("penalties"); at the same time, commencing substantive work to understand and accurately map the specific crisis situation (crisis management team); collecting information on a wide scale for this purpose (with particular attention to the group of stakeholders); based on the data thus obtained, a communication plan should be drawn up, paying particular attention to the specific needs and requirements of those affected and the concerns they have expressed; coordination is very important throughout the process, as it ensures a unified, consistent and coherent approach; cooperation between members of the crisis management team, within the organization (crisis management team and other members and units of the organization), and with other relevant external bodies and individuals is important for effectiveness; online and offline media stand out in particular in this regard. This is not only important from the point of view of information gathering, but also provides an opportunity, for example, to involve supporters, to develop a collective knowledge base, and to channel it into the communication plan (brainstorming, etc.); communication in the narrow sense

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11 Crises Control, 2023.

(real communication), which a) is based on a well-prepared plan; as a result, b) the specific communication channel, format, and style selected in line with the target group play an important role; c) it is important that the content of the communication is clear, accurate, and timely; d) since the specific goal is to regain or maintain trust, transparency and empathy are specific characteristics of the communication activity; communication with these characteristics also helps those affected by the problem (whether external or internal) to make informed decisions; since every stage of the process is subject to change, openness, quick adaptability, and creativity are very important; efficiency and the achievement of objectives require not only continuous monitoring of events, but also evaluation of the effects of crisis communication, control of its effectiveness, and making appropriate decisions accordingly (e.g., tasks, composition of the crisis management team, change of communication channels); continuous monitoring of activities can also reveal information (e.g., about the organization's structure, logistical and cooperation problems, weaknesses, and shortcomings) that can lead to changes and decisions after the crisis, thereby contributing to the more efficient operation of the institution in the long term.

In addition to the basic principles of communication, there are several special laws which, as subprinciples, only play an (important) role under certain conditions.

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