

COMMUNICATION STYLE - MIRROR OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S BEHAVIOR**Norina POPOVICI**

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Abstract. *In order to build our own future, we need to know ourselves better. In order to get rid of stress and feelings of helplessness, it is important to realize that the problems are not from the outside, not the others are to blame. Things we strongly believe have a significant impact on us. Our beliefs about our own person, about the world, about others, about our life perspectives - all our thoughts have an enormous impact on the man we become. The image we have of ourselves, of the others and of the surrounding world influences our behavior. There is a direct link between the style of communication and the effects we have on the sometimes positive, sometimes negative ones. Transactional Analysis is both a theory of communication and human personality. It is the analysis of the verbal and nonverbal messages exchanged on the communication process. It has evolved over the past decades, providing support in psychotherapy, personal development, education, management, marketing, sales, negotiation and communication in organizations. The "way of being" of individuals is observed in their behavior and in their style of communication. We analyzed the communication style predominant among the students at the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the "Ovidius" University of Constanta, a style of communication that reflects their dominant behavior. For this purpose, we used the questionnaire written by Julie Hay. Based on the questionnaires we analyzed, we selected 5 groups of 5 questions to see what motivates students in our university about their habits and self-confidence: the firmness with which they deal with those around them; the rationality they demonstrate in critical moments; obedience to others; the compassion it manifests; the attitude of giving orders. As a result of the analysis of these questionnaires, we noticed that the media of communication styles is attributed to an individual who has the predominant style of communication and behavior - the state of the Free Child, followed at very small differences by Adult and Careful Parent states. This means that predominantly university students predominate in their amiable and unstable attitude, the students being very relaxed, but also spontaneous and uninhibited, energetic and unguarded, predominantly predominant behavior in the first year of college. Likewise, this student also has the attitude of "here and now", but always carefully and caring about those around him.*

Keywords: *communication style; behavior; confidence; habits; transactional.*

Introduction

In order to build our own future, we need to know ourselves better. In order to get rid of stress and feelings of helplessness, it is important to acknowledge that problems do not come from the outside and that the others are not to blame.

The things we strongly believe in have a significant impact on us. Our beliefs about our own person, about the world, about the others, about our life perspectives – all our thoughts have an enormous impact on the person we become. The image we have of ourselves, of the others and of the surrounding world influences our behavior. There is a direct connection between the communication style and the effects we have on the people around us, which are sometimes positive and sometimes negative (Agabrian, 2008).

Each of us should propose, in the morning, in front of the mirror, to be the best version of ourselves every day. We need to be aware that every unfavorable situation we are going through has an equivalent or even a greater benefit.

The individuals' "way of being" is noticed in their behavior and in their communication style. We have analyzed the communication style that predominates among the students of the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the "Ovidius" University of Constanta, a communication style that reflects their dominant behavior.

Communication is the most valuable tool of today's leaders. The difference between a good and an excellent leader is given by the attitude wherewith s/he faces possible obstacles. An excellent leader is the one who creates leaders, while a weak leader creates executives (Ziglar, 2008).

Positive and realistic self-esteem develops the ability to make responsible decisions and the ability to cope with day-to-day pressures (Canfield & Hansen, 2012).

Transactional Analysis and the Ego States

In the last decades, transactional analysis has evolved, providing dedicated support in psychotherapy, personal development, education, management, marketing, sales, negotiation and communication across organizations (Popescu, 2001).

Transactional Analysis is both a theory of communication and human personality. Knowing and, above all, understanding the concepts and tools of transactional analysis means better self-knowledge, but also a better knowledge of others, as well as an effective tool for improving inter- and intra-personal communication.

Transactional analysis is, in fact, the analysis of verbal and non-verbal messages that underlie the communication process. From the point of view of transactional analysis, communication can be two-fold: explicit - it is carried out at a single personality level; complex - explicit and implicit, carried out at multiple personality levels (Navarro, 2014).

We are born with a "clean hardware" and in childhood, we begin to register, without discernment, most of the information we come into contact with. Through our senses, we experience life, but above all, we record what our parents tell us, then what the teachers tell us at school, and what all those labeled by our mind as "authorities" tell us. Later, with the aging process, although our mind filter develops, we remain with the same "habit" of taking "for granted" a lot of information provided by so-called "experts" in different areas. Being presented as "experts", we rarely question the information they hold. At some point, they no longer devote time to update the information they have. Over time, the information we receive turns into beliefs, convictions and/ or prejudices. The older we get, they get roots in our mind and turn it into a prison. This is how we become prisoners of our own mind, and the "escape" is far more complicated than we think at the first glance, because, according to Einstein, "It is easier to disintegrate an atom than a prejudice".

Human beings are not born with prejudices; there is no chromosome or gene that determines a person's bias level. People acquire prejudices from their parents at a very early age, and ultimately they incorporate them into their psychic structure and script, through frequent modeling, assignment, and guidelines (Shimoff & Kline, 2013).

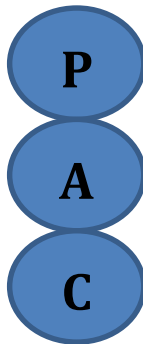


Figure 1. Ego states: Parent, Adult, Child

(Source: author's personal processing after de Graaf & Kunst, 2010, p.56)

The "ego state" is the fundamental concept of transactional analysis. It is defined as "a certain" way of being, "a coherent system of thoughts and feelings manifested by an appropriate pattern of behavior (and thus the way it communicates)" (RTAA, 2006). An individual's behavior is reflected by the way s/he communicates. Each ego state has a negative and a positive component. Somebody's personality, his/ her psychic structure is "compressed into the ego state" or into the three "ways of being", i.e. Parent, Adult, Child.

Child

The Child ego state responds exactly as the person responded when s/he was a child, at a certain age. It is characterized by the expression of emotions, thoughts, and behavior similar to childhood: spontaneity, bursting into laughter/ crying, curiosity, wailing, enthusiasm, pain, frustration.

This ego state is divided into the following components:

Adaptive Child:

- when s/he complies with the limits imposed by the society, s/he is "good" (+)

- lacks courage; s/he accepts unfavorable situations, only not to upset the others (-)
- Free (natural) Child:
- spontaneous and creative (+)
 - s/he does what s/he wants, without worrying about the others (-)

Adult

The ego state wherewith the person objectively appreciates/ assesses the environment and calculates possibilities and probabilities based on his/her previous experience is called the Adult ego state. It manifests itself when we make real decisions and it is characterized by thoughts, feelings, concrete behaviors such as "here and now". When we are in this state, we do not have value judgments, nor do we relive past feelings, but we are just logical and rational in order to solve present problems.

Parent

When this ego state is active, the person responds exactly as one of his/her parents did, and even when the person does not openly manifest this ego state, it acts as a Parental influence, fulfilling the functions of consciousness. Our conception of everything that surrounds us is strongly influenced by childhood experiences, which we later associate with our Parent state. We are in this state when we feel, think, and act as the important people around us (parents, educators). The comparisons we make are based on the standards and values, rules and norms used by them. It "expresses the internalization of the behavior of those who took care of us" (de Graaf & Kunst, 2010, pg. 57) during the period when we were most easily influenced.

The Critical Parent:

- Fixes boundaries and provides a structure, a safe framework (+)
- Excessively critical and domineering, imposes restrictions and always manifests dissatisfaction (-)

The Nurturing Parent:

- Make us protectors, able to give people compliments and attention (+)
- Makes us too concerned with people or too indulgent, more than the other needs (-)

In a healthy communication process, all ego states are used flexibly and interchangeably, in order to communicate effectively with the other persons (goal-oriented, with the Adult on demand).

When communicating, at least two persons are present. The communication process seen through transactional analysis is, in fact, an exchange (a stimulus and a response) between the ego state of two interlocutors. An individual's action and the other's response constitute a transaction. There are three types of transactions, accompanied by rules:

The communication process is continuous when transactions are complementary. This means that one interlocutor addresses a certain state of the other, and the second responds from that exact state. This communication type generates satisfaction. For example, a student asks his/her teacher: "When can we discuss the concerns about my work?" In this case, s/he uses his/her adult state and addresses the teacher's Adult state.

The teacher also responds to the Adult state: "I cannot tell you the exact time. I do not have my agenda". The two can then set their appointment based on both agendas.

The communication process is disrupted when one of the interlocutors responds from a different ego state than the one to whom the stimulus was addressed, with a cross-transaction. In such communication, exchanges are shorter. For example, the student who used the Adult state in order to get an appointment with the teacher may receive another answer: "This is the fourth time you get stuck in this work!" These words, the tone and even the expression of the teacher's face reveal that s/he spoke from the Critical Parent state. In response, the student's Adaptive Child will react, and s/he will say in a toneless and apologetic voice, "I'm sorry, but I really do not understand how to do it". This type of transaction interrupts the conversation or leads it to another level; thus, these elements are used in order to guide the conversation.

Hidden transactions have psychological (non-verbal) effects. These transactions take place differently at each of the three levels, i.e. social, verbal and the psychological. For example: When the course begins, the teacher asks, "Have you read all the materials that I sent you, Ana?" Apparently, the teacher wants a piece of information, but whoever is careful is clearly hearing the Critical Parent from his/her question. Without stating it clearly, the teacher actually says: "I guess you're as unprepared as the last time". Ana answers both the expression in the teacher's eyes and the tone of his/her words, as an Adaptive Child: "Eh, what do you mean? Of course, I will present my work properly, you know that!" The teacher can then clarify: "No, wait, I just wanted to make sure you got your training right!" However, this is not totally true. A hidden transaction can cause many misunderstandings during the communication process, which may be conscious or unconscious. This transaction is used, most often, in psychological games or in manipulating the interlocutor. Non-verbal messages, transmitted at the psychological level, are predominant in the communication process.

The Egogram at Ovidius University of Constanta

Using the questionnaire drawn up by Julie Hay, attached in Appendix 1, we wanted to see and analyze the predominant communication style among the students from the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the Ovidius University of Constanta, which reflects their dominant behavior. This questionnaire was filled in by 150 students, from different years of study and from different specializations.

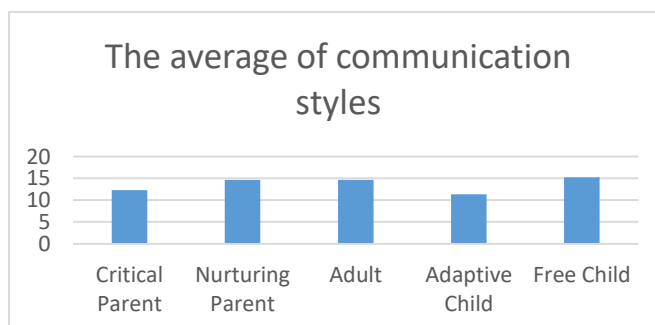


Figure 2. Average of the communication styles
(Source: personal questionnaire processing - Excel EGogram)

After analyzing these questionnaires, we noticed that the average of the communication styles is attributed to an individual whose predominant communication and behavior style is represented by the Free Child state, closely followed by the Adult state and by the Nurturing Parent state. This means that, as far as university students are concerned, their amused and unstable attitude predominates, the students being very relaxed, but also spontaneous and uninhibited, energetic and uncontrollable; this behavior predominates especially in the first year of study. Likewise, these students exhibit the attitude of "here and now", but are always careful and caring about those around them (Keller, 2012).

By analyzing the 150 questionnaires individually, we noticed that only 2% of the analyzed students display the Adaptive Child state, as the dominant ego state. This means that 3 out of the 150 students display an obedient, shameful and sad attitude; sometimes they have a defiant tone because their motto is "I cannot do it". This result seems encouraging.

12 students, i.e. 8% of the total number of students, display the dominant communication style of the Critical Parent. These are students who criticize, who display an authoritative attitude, point their finger at "the guilty" and use a firm tone. They believe that "must" is a lifestyle and orientate their lives according to "what they should do".

16% of the 150 students are characterized by the Nurturing Parent's approach. These 24 students are generous, understanding, caring. They have an indulgent, gentle tone, being always those who provide moral support. They are always nice and kind to those around them, smiling at all times.

35 of the 150 students are predominantly in the Adult state, which means that they often make decisions based on present reasoning, without considering previous experiences. They are always very attentive and have a precise tone, indicating the interest in present and correct actions.

24% of the analyzed students display the communicative style of the Free Child, which has been discussed earlier. This means that almost a quarter of the total number of students manifest their genuine emotions, have an open attitude, are energetic, relaxed, and curious. 47 students make the noise that teachers complain about and show interest in what they are passionate about.

The remaining 29 students did not describe a single dominant behavior style, adopting different ego states in different situations.

Correlations between the elements of the questionnaire

Based on the questionnaires analyzed in the previous chapter, we selected 5 groups of 5 questions each, in order to reveal what motivates the students in our university in terms of their habits and self-confidence:

- The firmness wherewith they deal with those around them.
- The rationality they demonstrate in critical moments.
- Obedience to others.
- The compassion they manifest.

- The attitude of giving orders.

Table 1 reveals some correlations between the statements "I firmly tell people how to behave" and "People do what I say", which means that the 150 students display this attitude towards the others because the environment in which they carry out their activity accepts this. "I firmly tell people how to behave because they do what I say". Instead, the calm attitude in crisis situations, the systematic and logical working style does not make students firm in the attitude they adopt.

Table 1. Group correlations 1 (Source: personal questionnaire processing)

	I firmly tell people how to behave.	I can keep calm in a crisis situation.	My working style is systematic and logical.	People complain that I behave like a boss.	People do what I say.
I firmly tell people how to behave.	1				
I can keep calm in a crisis situation.	0.013448	1			
My working style is systematic and logical.	0.129364	0.29855	1		
People complain that I behave like a boss.	0.238888	-0.07111	-0.03846	1	
People do what I say.	0.341471	0.089513	0.097471	0.299891	1

Table 2. Group Correlations 2 (Source: personal questionnaire processing)

	I have the tendency to weigh things rationally before acting.	I like to solve problems systematically and logically.	I am not afraid to tell people what I feel.	I ask many questions, so I am curious.	I am appreciated for my calm
I have the tendency to weigh things rationally before acting.	1				
I like to solve problems systematically and logically.	0.394265	1			
I am not afraid to tell people what I feel.	0.102851	0.223247	1		
I ask many questions, so I am curious.	0.01619	0.085885	0.321691	1	
I am appreciated for my calm attitude and the observations are judicious.	0.147586	0.20356	0.059066	0.051128	1

Table 2 shows that the students who weigh things rationally before acting do so because they are happy to solve problems systematically and logically. Curiosity does not cause them to act rationally; on the contrary, there is no correlation between these two statements. The appreciation of those around them for their calm attitude and judicious reasoning motivates them very little to think rationally before acting.

Table 3 shows that the students in our university do not accept the others' "orders" because they want to be with other people; because they are too emotional or because they always wait for directions, they accept too easily what they are told.

Table 3. Group correlations 3 (Source: personal questionnaire processing)

	I do what I am told.	I like to be with other people.	Compared to others, I am too emotional.	I expect my boss to tell me what I have to do and how to do it.	I accept too easily what others want.
I do what I am told.	1				
I like to be with other people.	0.005402	1			
Compared to others, I am too emotional.	0.227093	0.106505	1		
I expect my boss to tell me what I have to do and how to do it.	0.234262	0.042289	0.332558	1	
I accept too easily what others want.	0.31607	0.142317	0.341564	0.20843	1

Table 4. Group correlations 4 (Source: personal questionnaire processing)

	I sympathize with people who have problems.	When we have a new colleague, I try as much as I can to show him/her all she needs to know.	I worry too much about people.	I stimulate people to test their own capacities.	I took care even of people who could manage by themselves.
I sympathize with people who have problems.	1				
When we have a new colleague, I try as much as I can to show him/her all she needs to know.	0.114102	1			
I worry too much about people.	0.43949	0.23161	1		
I stimulate people to test their own capacities.	0.137693	0.310805	0.075029	1	

	I sympathize with people who have problems.	When we have a new colleague, I try as much as I can to show him/her all she needs to know.	I worry too much about people.	I stimulate people to test their own capacities.	I took care even of people who could manage by themselves.
I took care even of people who could manage by themselves.	0.243341	0.093854	0.219866	0.122298	1

Because they care for others, students are compassionate with those around them, and there is a direct correlation between these two statements, as shown in Table 4. However, when they have a new colleague and they should help him/her, they do not strive to do this, for fear that someone knows more or that someone can take their place.

Table 5. Group correlations 5 (Source: personal questionnaire processing)

	I tell people what to do.	When I know that I am right, I insist that the others listen to me.	I am very passionate about my work.	People say that I am creative and inventive.	I rather take the control than being led by others.
I tell people what to do.	1				
When I know that I am right, I insist that the others listen to me.	0.185351	1			
I am very passionate about my work.	-0.14301	0.100468	1		
People say that I am creative and inventive.	0.229581	0.113722	0.02248	1	
I rather take the control than being led by others.	0.209232	0.197852	-0.04392	0.190217	1

Table 5 shows that students prefer to be decision-makers and not be led by others; that is why they often tell people what to do. When the enthusiasm for their activity grows, the desire to give orders decreases, and when they receive praise for their creativity and inventiveness, they feel justified to show people the "correct way."

Conclusions

"To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else - means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting".

People hear 1% of what you say and 99% of what they are interested in. Many people have the impression that they communicate, but, in fact, they do not. Real communication can only exist between two or more authentic people who leave the masks aside and let the message be transmitted from the essence of their own being and receive the others' message in the depths of their being.

Communication is not just about what we are saying; it is far from it. What we say comes from what we are. Authentic communication is all we need. We only need to express ourselves, and what we say is a flimsy part of this self-expression.

"We become what we think we will become". When we are convinced that we can reach a goal, we begin to work towards it.

Perception is the process through which we understand the environment and respond to it by extracting the information that corresponds to our reference system, filtering what does not fit. The opinions built without facts or before knowing the facts are nothing but prejudices. Deductions and assumptions occur throughout the perception process and overcome gross information; they guide us and influence our behavior, rely on previous (cognitive) perceptions and information and sometimes lead to deformations and imprecision (Mucchielli, 2014).

Praise and criticism are two ways of giving feedback in teaching. It is very important for a teacher to be an example for his/her students and help them develop and find their own way. A brief remark from a professor, whom s/he respects, can convince a student of the skills s/he has (Pease & Pease, 2013).

In everyday life, people listen to less than 25% of the spoken messages that they receive. Immediately after receiving the message, a normal listener remembers only 50% of the received information, and 48 hours later s/he retains only 25% of the incoming messages in the active memory.

A person's life consists of 18-year cycles. In each cycle, certain characteristic needs are met. If at the respective time the need that had to be met was not met, this need will be fulfilled in the next training cycle, during the same period (current age - 18 years = the training stage period).

The students' average communication style (i.e. the students' predominant communication style) is represented by the Free Child state, followed closely by the Adult and the Nurturing Parent state. This means that among our university students, an amused and unstable attitude predominates, the students being very relaxed, but also spontaneous and disinhibited, energetic and uncontrollable; this predominant behavior is manifested especially in the first year of study. Likewise, these students also display the attitude of "here and now", but they are always careful and caring about those around them.

Only 2% of the analyzed students display as dominant ego state, the Adaptive Child state. This means that 3 out of the 150 students display a submissive and shameful attitude; they are sad and sometimes they have a defiant tone because their motto is "I cannot do it" – which is an encouraging result.

We think that there should be more creative and inventive students, more Free Children, with a positive attitude towards everything that surrounds us. We believe that 47 students display a predominantly communicative style – the Free Child; however, these are too few for a balanced university system. In most cases, the educational system restricts, limits the students' ability to manifest themselves as they wish. This situation teaches students to observe some rules, to be rewarded with grades for their intelligence, not for their creativity. We believe that emotional intelligence is poorly developed in the current educational system, and this situation cannot entail the formation and training of excellent leaders.

The students in our university do not accept the others' "orders" because they want to be with other people, but because they are too emotional. They accept too easily what they are told, and they always wait for directions.

According to Aristotle "We are what we do repeatedly. Excellency is therefore not an act but a habit."

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