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COMMUNICATION THEORY AND PRACTICE



Theory and Practice of the Fundamentals of Communication

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THE VALUE OF COMMUNICATION THEORIES

The appreciation and study of human communication arises from research, observation, practice, and theories that explain the phenomena, realities, and facts of communication; the various components, characteristics, and qualities of human expression and exchange; and the innumerable circumstances, conditions, events, and experiences it creates, in our occurring world, throughout life.

Communication theories, as systematic, scientific explanations, offer principles and practices, models and metaphors, patterns and paradigms that unify and clarify facts, that define and describe the essence of expression and exchange, that create comprehension and understanding for interactivity and its influence and effect on being and becoming, on existence and reality, through countless circumstances, conditions, contexts, and events experienced in life. Although no theory offers an absolute explanation or representation of reality, we advance our comprehension and understanding of communication – we advance our skills, practice, and proficiency – using the facts, components, and qualities of human expression and exchange in theory.

OBSERVATION, RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND THEORY

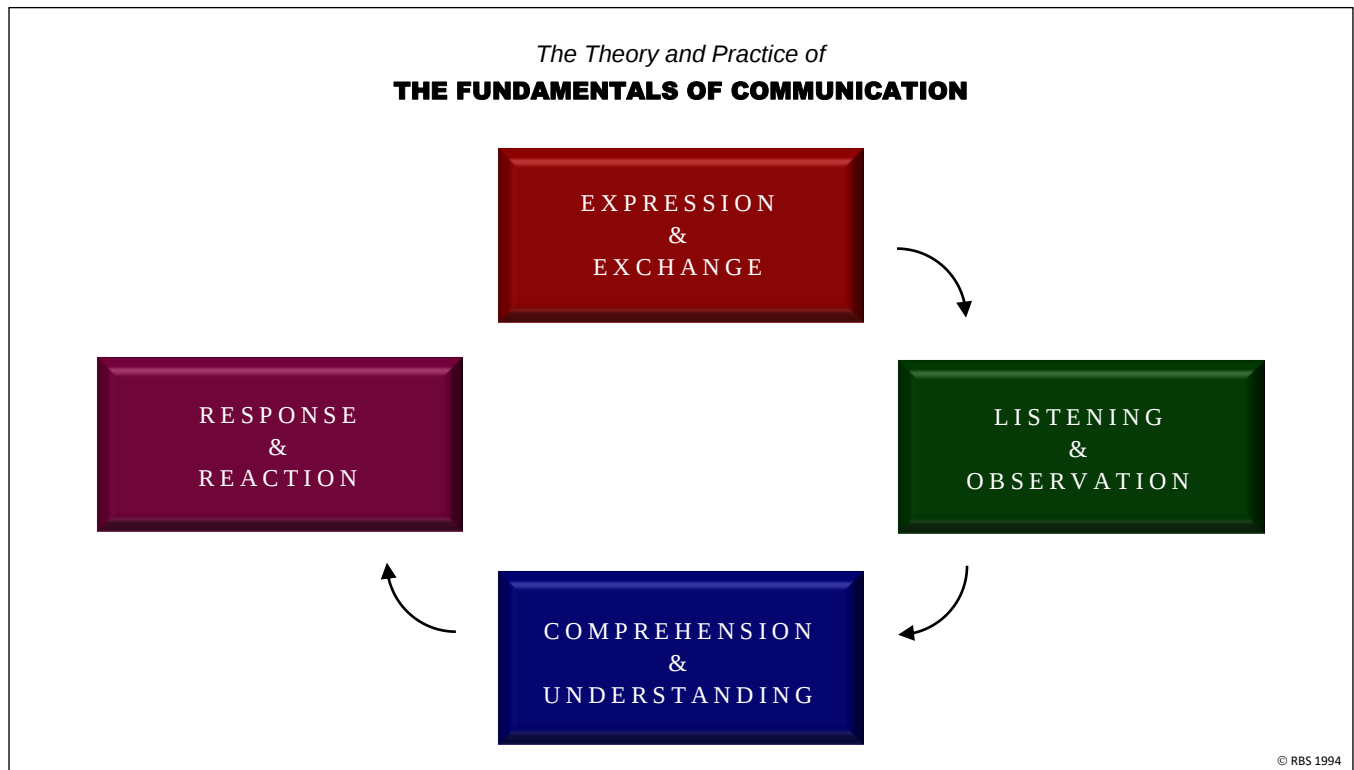
Working nearly fifty years in the business of business communications as a communications specialist, strategist, creative director, writer, and designer, to mention a few areas of my experience and expertise, I have always been fascinated in the nature of human expression and exchange especially in learning and knowing what works and what doesn't work to produce intended outcomes. Accordingly, I have a deep interest in the exploration, observation, study, and research of communication and the practical, productive application of models and theories, assumptions and ideals, opinions and principles. My background in business communications includes promotional and motivational communications; advertising; public and professional relations; internal and external corporate communications; technical, educational, clinical, and scientific writing; public speaking and broadcast media; professional education, instruction, and training programs; and leadership training and personal coaching. Besides the research of professionals and theorists, I have also conducted various forms of research over the years for my clients including surveys, one-on-one studies, image and message testing, focus groups, market analyses, and more.

In my expertise and experience, I have come to recognize certain facts, realities, and phenomena of human communication; accordingly, I have established a series of theories, based on universal truths, which advance our knowledge and understanding of expression and exchange, which advance our skills, practice, and proficiency for achieving full self-expression, for reaching desired outcomes, for satisfying our needs, wants, and desires in life. The Theory and Practice of the Fundamentals of Communication is first in a series of theories.

FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is comprised of four distinctions; first, there is the distinction of expression and exchange, the most basic propositions of human interaction. As expression and exchange, communication initially arises with self-expression (representations of personal thoughts and feelings, individuality and ideas) and evolves into shared exchange (conversations of connection and relationship for satisfying needs, wants, and desires). Regarding sensorial receptivity, the second distinction is listening and observation which may include other perceptions like tactile, gustatory, and olfactory sensations experienced during communication practices. Third, there is the distinction of comprehension and understanding for that which is depicted, articulated, and conveyed; and fourth, there is the distinction of response and reaction, created from our listening and observation and then processed in our comprehension and understanding. Response and reaction are the replies resulting from the influences and effects of shared, reciprocal interactions experienced throughout expression and exchange.

Often, these fundamental communication distinctions are non-apparent, they occur as a particular, unified communication experience. Accordingly, we do not differentiate and isolate these distinctions; rather we consider communication as a normal and natural function of life, an occurrence in itself. And yet, in our commonplace everyday expression and exchange, we convey thoughts, feelings, and ideas to others in many ways; we receive thoughts, feelings, and ideas of others in our listening and observation; we process thoughts, feelings, and ideas in our comprehension and understanding; and we reply, respond, and react to the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of others with our own thoughts, feelings, and ideas. In view of that, we should differentiate the four distinctions that comprise the fundamentals of communication, first, for the sake of creating clarity and, second, for advancing the efficiency and effectiveness of interaction for our self and others.



EXPRESSION AND EXCHANGE

In its most basic form, communication is merely expression and exchange. While expression is the declaration and depiction of thoughts and feelings, opinions and judgements, attitudes and values, perceptions and beliefs, exchange is the sharing and conveyance of those thoughts and feelings, opinions and judgements, attitudes and values, perceptions and beliefs. As such, our communication involves the exchange of expressions, sharing and conveying what we declare and depict. Because expression occurs in thinking, being, becoming, speaking, and doing, it is the physical and psychological representation of existence and individuality. Exchange occurs from expression; it advances relatedness and community.

In our need for being fully self-expressed, we give voice to who we are; what we think is meaningful, relevant, and valuable; and what we need, want, and desire in life. In being fully self-expressed, we give voice to our thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the things we experience and create in life. In addition, we give voice to memories recalling, reminiscing, and remembering the past; we give voice to our imagination and creativity, our inventions and inspirations for creating a future; and we give voice to our existence, our very being in the present moment.

Accordingly, self-expression is essential to life. It is essential for individuals to be seen and heard, recognized and acknowledged; self-expression fulfills our basic needs for individuality as well as belongingness, for self-sufficiency as well as dependency. What's more, self-expression fulfills our other basic needs to communicate, create, and relate. With self-expression, we create thoughts, feelings, and ideas for our self and others; and, with self-expression, we relate to our self and others in those thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Lastly, self-expression fulfills our essential need to achieve, acquire, and grow physically, emotionally, intellectually,

spiritually, morally, and socially. In the final analysis, expression is the particular, personal representation of self; it is a monologue in the most accurate sense of the word, an expression of one voice.

However, when two or more people are engaged in conversation, the fundamental quality of communication transforms from individual self-expression to communally shared exchange; we move from monologue to dialogue, from one voice to two voices and then to more voices. Dialogue represents this collective narrative of individual expressions and multiple voices, shared in a group setting.

To be clear, shared exchange is the involved, functioning interaction of expression; it is the interaction of one's expression in reply to another's expression. As such, shared exchange is conversation involving thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a succession of individual expressions replying to the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of others based on our own thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Exchange occurs in expression replying, responding, or reacting to expression replying, responding, or reacting to expression and so forth. As such, exchange is a succession of expression.

During this succession of expression and exchange, listening and observation clearly contribute to our comprehension and understanding of other's thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Listening and observation provide us a basis from which we can reply; and so, in our response from listening and observation, we can create a meaningful exchange and a valued dialogue. In our positive, productive listening and observation, reply recognizes and acknowledges others, it creates respect and appreciation for them and their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. What's more, positive, productive listening and observation create a foundation for being connected and related as well as being present with people in conversations which, in turn, engender possibilities with them for creating and nurturing meaningful, valued relationships. We will further examine this second distinction, listening and observation, shortly.

When we examine the fundamental nature of communication, we realize that all articulation, conveyance, and reply originate in self-expression and that self-expression is the substance, the origin, the source of all communication. Our self-expression, however, is not only and simply the source of all our communication; it is the essence of our life and living. Our full self-expression is essential to the individual. It is who we are, what we think, what we feel, what we believe, what we remember, and what we create. Full self-expression is vital, essential, and decisive in our existence in that we have a voice, and that we matter, and that we are known, acknowledged, valued, and loved in this life. Full self-expression gives us our existence and being.

And so, if full self-expression is vital to the individual and essential to life and living, then it stands to reason that exchange is also essential and vital, but in a different way. Shared exchange is essential for us to live and work and play with other people. It is vital in making associations, connections, and relationships in life giving rise to family, community, and organizations. As such, shared exchange makes life and love and living together possible. The fundamental nature of communication reflects the fundamental nature of being; we are created to live together, to share our self and give to others, and to be fully self-expressed.

Exchange is associating, sharing, connecting, giving, and relating to others in our listening and observation of them; we comprehend and understand the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of others, we realize and acknowledge

their world. And yet our conversations do not always create understanding or appreciation. We do not always produce agreement or acceptance for our thoughts, feelings, and ideas and those of others nor do we, in fact, always create awareness, comprehension, and understanding for them in our conversation. Nevertheless, we must remember, conversation is the only access and means to gaining awareness, comprehension, and understanding. Conversation creates questions and provides answers; it makes connections, creates opportunities, addresses problems, and generates relationships. It is our means to gaining agreement and acceptance, interest and involvement, with thoughts, things, and other beings in our world. And when we gain these things – understanding, agreement, acceptance, interest, and involvement – our conversations have the capacity to engender coherence, common unity, and community. In our expression and exchange, listening and observation, comprehension and understanding, our conversations create relationships and community. Keep in mind, however, our conversations can also destroy relationships when expression and exchange, listening and observation, break down intentionally or unintentionally.

LISTENING AND OBSERVATION

The second distinction of the fundamentals of communication is listening and observation. Neither expression nor exchange work without intentional listening and observation, without being attentive and purposeful in really hearing and seeing others, without being present with others. As such, optimal listening and observation require great discipline and skill.

Listening and observation require listening and observation without personal consideration; that is to say, listening to and really hearing others and observing and really seeing others without forming any opinions, judgements, perceptions, or beliefs; without forming any assessments or coming to any conclusions; without inserting thoughts, feelings, and ideas into the conversation. In other words, listening and observation begin with simply getting that which is depicted and articulated. In view of that, listening and observation require even greater discipline and skill because people inherently judge that which they hear and see as right or wrong, good or bad, true or false, like or dislike, agree or disagree, and so forth rather than just being with others in their self-expression. What's more, people inherently search for and make meaning of what they hear and see usually from their points of view rather than the perspectives of others.

Listening and observation advance in how we listen and observe and, as such, they require active participation in hearing and seeing others; that is to say, being present in the moment with people, acknowledging that which they depict and articulate, and, as appropriate, rephrasing and summarizing that which is heard and seen.

And finally, listening and observation advance in comprehending and understanding that which is meaningful, relevant, and valued by others; acknowledging and appreciating that which others are dealing with and that which interests and concerns others. Getting the world of others, listening and observation contribute to our ability to create meaningful, valued backgrounds of relatedness with people and it is in creating backgrounds of relatedness that contribute to advancing communication, creation, and relation in life.

Like expression and exchange, listening and observation are essential to life and living, especially in experiencing what others and the world have to offer us. Yet it seems, during our interactions with people, that we are more interested in our own words, in our own expression, rather than listening to and observing the expressions of

others which, as we well know, usually affects our ability to create meaningful exchange and valued relationships. Routinely, we don't listen thoroughly to others in ways that acknowledge and validate them and their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Rather we typically busy our self determining what we want to say when others are speaking and so we are not truly present with others and, as a result, our listening and observation goes missing. On the whole as a society, we don't listen, we have never listened, we will never listen, and, what's more, we aren't even listening now.

COMPREHENSION AND UNDERSTANDING

The third distinction of the fundamentals of communication is comprehension and understanding. Requiring great discipline and skill, intentional listening and observation contribute to comprehension and understanding. Simply stated, comprehension is sensing and perceiving that which is depicted and articulated by others and that which is of interest and concern to them; and, understanding is realizing, recognizing, and processing that information while acknowledging and appreciating it.

In hearing and seeing, touching and feeling, tasting and smelling, our sensory system is the primary source of life and living, of consciousness, cognition, and communication. Our senses supply the mind with the information, messages, and data we sense and perceive in our environment from people and things. While comprehension is the function of the mind in matters of sensory perception, understanding is the function of the mind in matters of cognitive recognition. From sensing, listening, and observation, comprehension and understanding transform sensory information into processed information; we perceive information and we process information. In our awareness and knowledge, we review and consider this information for its potential meaning, relevance, and value for our self and others.

Through fundamental comprehension and understanding, we ordinarily perceive associations and connections in thoughts and things; we recognize differentiation and generalization, we distinguish qualities and quantities, we experience regularity and change, we discern commonality and uniqueness, and we discover relationships. What's more, we evaluate and assess, we compare and contrast, we define and describe, we distinguish and classify thoughts and things, people and places, conditions and circumstances, environments and events. We experience and interpret the world through the sum of our perception, through listening, observation, and other sensoria; and, we develop awareness and knowledge by intellectually and intuitively processing that which we sense and perceive.

Accordingly, the distinction of comprehension and understanding in the fundamentals of communication is essential to understanding and being understood, appreciating and being appreciated, acknowledging and being acknowledged.

RESPONSE AND REACTION

The fourth distinction of the fundamentals of communication is response and reaction. Response and reaction are forms of reply that recognize and acknowledge, answer and appreciate that which is depicted and articulated by others. In recognizing and acknowledging the expression of another, by answering and appreciating the expression of another, we engage in exchange. Thus, we have expression and exchange.

As we well know, response and reaction are two different forms of reply; response is positive in nature whereas reaction is negative. Accordingly, we respond or react to that which is depicted and articulated; we respond or react to the circumstances, conditions, and events of the communication; we respond or react to the communicator; and we respond or react to the meaning, relevance, and value of the communication for our self and others.

While responsive reply is encouraging, affirmative, and optimistic, reactive reply is discouraging, adverse, and pessimistic. Positive, responsive reply is thoughtful, reasoned, and measured feedback. Negative, reactive reply is emotional, capricious, and imprudent feedback. Both responsive replies and reactive replies arise out of our thoughts and feelings, opinions and judgements, perceptions and beliefs. As such, our replies, responses, and reactions either advance or degenerate expression and exchange.

BENEFITS AND VALUE

In summary, the Theory and Practice of the Fundamentals of Communication are comprised of four interdependent, mutually reinforcing distinctions; they are: expression and exchange, listening and observation, comprehension and understanding, and response and reaction. Together, these distinctions comprise the continuum of communication; they define the fundamental nature of human interaction, the very essence of conversation.

Beginning with the expression of thoughts, feelings, and ideas of others, we listen and observe, comprehend and understand them, and, in our response or reaction, we express our thoughts, feelings, and ideas; all of this gives rise to exchange. As such, the continuum of communication starts with expression and continues through a succession of expression called exchange. Communication is our access for comprehending and understanding the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of our self and others.

Given that we communicate to create and relate, communication is our principal pathway to generating possibilities and opportunities as it is also our principal pathway to solving problems and challenges. Besides creating agreement, relationships, and common unity, communication can also create disagreements, differences, and conflicts; and yet, it can also resolve these problems and challenges. All disagreements, differences, and conflicts are solvable in communication. Consider for a moment: if self-expression is optimal in what it depicts and articulates and in how it presents and delivers that information; and, if listening and observation are optimal; and, if comprehension and understanding are optimal; then exchange will be optimal. If, however, there is a breakdown in any of these distinctions, the fundamentals of communication are the means of addressing and resolving it.

In view of this, the Theory and Practice of the Fundamentals of Communication provide the communicator greater understanding for the features, purposes, benefits, and value of its distinctions for advancing the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of all communication.

OVERVIEW MAP

Theory and Practice of the Fundamentals of Communication

1. Expression and Exchange

A. Expression

Monologue: Depiction or Declaration, Intention or Proposition in Life

B. Exchange

Dialogue: Convey and Share with Others in Life

2. Listening and Observation

A. Listening

Listening to and Really Hearing Others

B. Observing

Observing and Really Seeing Others

C. Other Sensory Access

Perceiving from Tactile, Gustation, and Olfaction Stimuli

3. Comprehension and Understanding

A. Comprehension

Sensing and Perceiving That Which Is:

- Depicted and Articulated
- Of Interest and Concern

B. Understanding

Realizing, Recognizing, and Processing That Which Is:

- Depicted and Articulated
- Of Interest and Concern

4. Response and Reaction

A. Reply

Acknowledging and Appreciating Expression

B. Response

Positive Reply: Thoughtful, Reasoned, and Measured Feedback

C. Reaction

Negative Reply: Emotional, Impulsive, and Unconsidered Feedback