DEFINING COMMUNICATION: FACTORS AND BARRIERS OF A COMPLEX CONCEPT

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Abstract:
This article aims to analyze the history of the concept of Communication, the evolution, and the different approaches from several scientific domains that led to the understanding that we have nowadays about this complex theme. Today, communication is a key issue in modern societies, not just for the individual and the current challenges in the information society, but also when the concept is understood in more complex frameworks such as organizational communication. It is this act, derived from a personal and social need, that allows human beings to live together, to establish contacts with others: the way we relate to other individuals, the greater or lesser effectiveness of these connections, depending on much of our communication skills. After analyzing the concept, the importance of communication in today's society is evaluated, as well as the most important objectives accordingly to several uses in contemporary contexts and barriers that can affect this process.

Keywords: communication, communication factors, communication barriers

1. Introduction

In contemporary societies, communication is the most powerful mobilizing instrument, capable of causing effects on all human beings and fields of activity. In the interpersonal, intergroup, or mass domains, it imposes its rules on the relationship between men and its effects became omnipresent in our time. If the 19th century was marked by industrial development, which caused profound changes in the social and labor plans. The century that has just ended favored communication and its devices, capable of instantly connecting the five continents. In this way, ideas, styles, and ways of life come together and become uniform, which reflects the new ideology that marks our times. Duarte Rodrigues, referring to this matter, even adds:

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"… it cannot be said that there is a univocal cause and effect relationship between the development of information devices and the emergence of the new communicational ideology; both seem to appear at the same time, constituting the two sides of the same coin, in the turning point that marks the very process of modernity today." (1994: 14)

To this extent, defining the concept of communication is not an easy task. Given the complex nature of the process, it is legitimate to use the term in a variety of ways. In a globalizing perspective, we consider the conceptualization of Jurgen Ruesch pertinent (in Littlejohn, 1982: 37), when he states: *"Communication is the process that connects discontinuous parts of the living world"*. The etymological basis of the word, from the Latin *"communicare"*, means *"to have or to share, to share, to share something with someone"*. On the human side, communicating will therefore be the act of sharing with others a certain content of information, which can be thoughts, ideas, intentions, desires, or knowledge, so that, through an act of communication, we come to have something in common with the one to whom we address.

One of the first scholars to research the communication phenomenon, Charles Cooley, stated in 1909 that communication is the "*mechanism through which human relationships exist and develop.*" (apud Santos, 1992: 9). This idea defines the act of communicating as the essential form of existence. However, the definition of communication has been refined over the years; the word is now understood to be the expression of ideas and emotions through a code. Communicating then means transmitting – voluntarily or involuntarily – meanings from one point to another. Communication is, in its principle, the passage from the individual to the collective, consisting of an exchange of messages loaded with meaning. Alex Gode (in Littlejohn, 1982: 37) reinforces: *"(…) it is a process that makes common for two or many what was the monopoly of one or a few"*. Fonseca (1998: 65) agrees when he states: *"communication is a process based on the exchange between two or more people who use a code of words, gestures, expressions or signs, which make comprehensible information transmitted by an issuer to one or more receivers."*

Theories aside, it is indisputable that communication has been, since the dawn of humanity, one of the most useful tools at the service of human beings. This is a being poorly protected against natural forces, more fragile than many animals; by logic, it should be doomed to disappear. However, it compensates for its weakness with cunning, manual skill, and cognitive ability. As Rodrigues (1996: 47) refers, *"Endowed with a large brain and a complex symbolic language, Man was able to develop cognitive knowledge, through the complex transmission of information and knowledge across generations."* Biped about 5-4 million years ago, it launched himself on the evolutionary path that made it the most successful and powerful animal on Earth. The only being that manufactures instruments and weapons, with the ability to handle fire, was able to manipulate the environment with greater ease in this way, also learning to meet its needs through an increasingly elaborate communication system; unlike animals, he created a progressive communicational model, which is enriched with each generation.

It is not possible to precisely define the origin of human communication. The first communicative acts were gestures and expressions, and for centuries or millennia, they were reduced to sound or gesture signals emitted by human beings. Man was thus the only medium of communication, and only on an interpersonal level was this possible. In a subsequent phase, drawing and music revolutionized the lives of individuals and groups: the message could go beyond immediate space and time. Somewhere in history, Man understood that the previous ones were too reductive ways of expressing himself, and created alternatives, effective extensions of his senses, overcoming the barriers of temporal and spatial distances. Also according to Rodrigues (1996), around 100,000 years ago language appeared, characteristic of Homo Sapiens, which became the essential instrument of all human communication. Language, oral or written, is effectively the clearest form of communication, insofar as it is an objective exchange of meanings or, more commonly, a transmission of information that implies the emission of the message and its reception. (Cazeneuve, 1996).

Another decisive phase in the history of communication begins with the establishment of the Press, in the 17th century, and reaches its peak with the use of satellites. These collective media created a new society, based on mass communication. Jean Cloutier (nd: 32), defines this historical moment as the one in which "*copying will multiply its message to infinity, reproduction will reconstitute it without shame, diffusion will instantly spread it everywhere and your interlocutors will be innumerable*". In the most recent episode in the history of communication, the individual media or self-media, supported by a unique technological advance in human history, offers man a new era full of possibilities. Thanks to these means, man can now send and receive information selected by him, accessing messages that are always available.

We have seen, through this brief review, that the communication phenomenon is not only associated with industrial civilization; what it entails again, in our time, is the specialization of tasks, the delimitation of specific positions for communicators, and the strong valorization of the act of communicating, according to the economic and social advantages that are inherent to it (Álvarez and Caballero, 1998).

Communicating nowadays is no longer a natural, unconscious, tribal act, as in the public square or village, but the expression of a universe of supports capable of connecting beings through space, or time, to get your interaction. At the time of self-media, man acquires the possibility of having access to messages that are always available, and simultaneously, the ability to express himself: "*Emerec is the starting point and the ending point of communication. It is no longer just informed, it informs and informs itself.*" (Cloutier, s.d.: 43). However, the author warns: "*interpersonal communication continues to be the basis of human relationships. None of the other types of communication, subsequently established, will be able to replace it without risking dehumanizing Emerec.*" (idem: 25). In our opinion, this should not be feared, however, as we believe in the cumulative character of the history of communication, which substantially enriches us: each new medium that human beings create over time joins the existing ones, increasing thus their ability to exchange information.

2. Communication objectives

Never before has there been so much talk about communication and its potential, for which we are all targeted. A multifunctional phenomenon, it involves all fields of human activity, thus emerging as extremely vast and polysemic, polarizing all types of knowledge and connections. It is this act, derived from a personal and social need, that allows human beings to live together, to establish contacts with others: the way we relate to other individuals, the greater or lesser effectiveness of these connections, depending on much of our communication skills. In the sense that, as we saw above, communicating means sharing, sharing information, emotions, or expectations with others, the process responds to a vital human need, that of having something in common with other individuals. And if for millennia, the act of communication was limited to signals emitted by the body, there was a time when humanity understood that this was a somewhat limited way of expressing itself; creating extensions of their senses, thus making possible the emergence of mass communication, through a panoply of media.

It is in this modern historical context that man has sought to scientifically approach communication, seeking to explain it and reflect on it. In contemporary societies, the phenomenon encompasses multiple meanings, as the proliferation of technological instruments on the scale of our century has added new possibilities in Communication Sciences and has broadened its reach within the Social Sciences: it has motivated the curiosity of such different areas of study. such as sociology, economics, political science, history, psychology, or philosophy (Mattelart, 1997). In this way, in the sense in which we know the concept today, we can see it as recent; it was only in the middle of this century that its significance began to truly expand, and a scientific concern with this theme developed, which quickly established itself as an autonomous universe. (Breton, 1994?). Since that time, attempts to systematize their influence have been frequent. The evolution registered as a field of study can be summarized in three phases, to which a pre-scientific phase must be added (Ferreira et al., 1996): let us remember that already in Classical Antiquity Aristotle wrote *Rhetoric*, a work considered by many as being at the origin of the whole conceptualization about the communication process. However, it is in the 20th century, more specifically in the period between the end of World Wars I and II, that the first studies on mass communication and its effects on public opinion were developed. Authors such as Paul Lazarsfeld, Harold Lasswell, and Bernard Berelson devote much attention to these themes, although the subject is still framed within the scope of other disciplines, and predominantly formulated in empirical terms.

In the period between the mid-40s and the 70s, communication asserts itself as an autonomous field of study. Lasswell's contribution with his classic paradigm stands out, stating that the clearest way to describe an act of communication is to answer the questions *"who says what, through what channel, to whom, with what effect?". As the author himself observed, the scientific study of the communication process tends to focus on one of these questions. The usefulness of this formula resulted in the possibility, for the first time, of research in this area, compartmentalizing major communication problems. North American academic George Gerbner also stood out, by systematizing and exploring a methodology currently in use in*

the study of communication: content analysis, which seeks to present a measurable and verifiable calculation of the manifest content of messages, through the counting of certain units" (Santos, 1992). The stage of maturity in the scientific study of communication appears after 1970 and is characterized by the use of scientific methods in studies of an experimental nature, and by the proliferation of theoretical models.

Unanimously regarded as a process of complex scope, communication is therefore massively conceptualized by authors who seek to measure their capacity to influence and their scope of action. Some, such as Ruesch and Bateson (1968), present a model that considers four levels of interacting communication. The first of them, called intrapersonal, occurs when the individual thinks for himself. A cornerstone of all human communication, it reflects the behavior of human beings while acquiring, processing, or consuming information. The next level is interpersonal, where the individual relates to others in the social context. We are faced with an interaction process, in which man alternately plays the roles of participation (transmission) and observation (reception). The central concern in terms of analysis is how certain individuals affect each other through communication. Level III is group, which means the participation of several individuals. However, what can be seen here is that the transmission and reception roles can be more distorted: as communication involves more participants, the completeness of the information received decreases.

It is at this stage that Institutional Communication can be integrated, which studies how individuals relate professionally and socially within the groups to which they inevitably belong since communication between these takes place permanently in the work context. At level IV, also translated as cultural or mass level, it is difficult to identify the origin and destination of messages, as the meaning of communication is from many to many. In this case, communication translates messages about the assumptions of reality sustained in a cultural group. These include legislation, various regulations, orally transmitted customs, or architectural objects and structures that translate the voice of the past.

About the objectives, and from the point of view of the issuer, we can consider Inform, Educate, Animate and Distract as communication functions (Cloutier, s.d.; Fonseca, 1998). The informative function is centered on the action of indicating, of disseminating news, which tends to satisfy the desire of each person to know what is going on, out of a vital need or out of simple curiosity. Information, as a function of communication, is essential to man. In the dawn of time, it served mainly to satisfy their primary needs; physiological, protective, reproductive. It was restricted to the individual's daily reality, to the geographic limits of their travels. Later, the information served to consolidate authority and power. The possibility of transmitting at a distance arose, but it also allowed for the creation of ever deeper gaps between those who shared the information and those who were excluded from it.

The invention of typography, by Gutenberg, is the genesis of the written press and the democratization of knowledge. Centuries later, radio and television were born, and the diffusion of information across the planet took place instantly. Human beings can know everything about everything, even if this does not directly affect their lives.

Currently, in the era of individual communication, man is no longer limited to being informed: he informs his peers. Today, technology extends our senses, allows us to communicate anywhere and in real-time. With the acceleration and miniaturization of equipment, the presence at a distance and the exploration of virtual worlds are facilitated. People from all over the Earth can communicate quickly with each other, creating new communities of work and friendship, in which physical distance is not an obstacle. The traditional economic system will probably give way to another one, which will privilege free time and the quality of work experience. In the new digital age that emerges with the connection to telematic networks, virtual communities are created and new and complex forms of sociability appear.

In turn, the educational function manifests itself in man throughout his entire existence. In the life of primitive beings, the information transmitted by the parents and the group was almost enough to guarantee survival. Later, the school became the main source of education; currently, the world itself is also a shaper, manifesting itself in the daily lives of each one, enhanced by travel and emphasizing through the mass media, which then become a true parallel school: through audio and script visual languages, those means provide elements of knowledge to individuals. Today, with self-media, each one of us becomes a self-educator, who can access knowledge through a simple computer keyboard. In the age of individual communication, education tends to become permanent for each one of us, digital beings.

As for animation, and despite the term being relatively recent, we know that it is an activity that has already existed for a long time. Human beings have always tried to convince the other, to get them to share their points of view, thus seeking to alter the original situation between themselves and the environment in which they find themselves. As Berlo puts it:

> *"Our basic aim is to reduce the probability that we are simply a target of external forces, and to increase the probability that we exert force ourselves. Our basic objective in communication is to become influential agents, it is to influence others, our physical environment, and ourselves, it is to become determining agents, it is to have an option in the course of things. In short, we communicate to influence – to influence with intent."* (1985: 22).

Religion, politics, or advertising are forms of animation verified over time in the search for integration, participation, sharing an idea, and grouping individuals according to their common interests. In the first case, because, in ancient times, religion was a form of animation, before becoming a structure of cohesion. About advertising, a characteristic element of industrial societies, we are faced with an extremely concerted form of animation: techniques orchestrated with the greatest care allow reaching the consumer, in an appealing, suggestive way, leading him to assume certain behaviors. In today's world, forms of animation are directed in different directions: they no longer only involve the mass media but are transferred to each individual and their group. People who share

identical lifestyles and customs of life are grouped horizontally, in groups that allow each human being to express themselves and exercise their creativity.

Finally, communication also presents the ability to distract individuals: a fundamental need, distraction manifested itself in the beginnings of humanity through games and dances attended by everyone: it was, therefore, a collective phenomenon. In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, evolution led the human being, little by little, to become distracted by proxy (Cloutier, s.d.); in an age of transposition, artists and sportsmen were paid to express themselves in the name of an anonymous mass that became only a passive spectator. In our days - the days of Emerec - industrial society begins to be just a memory. Human groups, who value and privilege the existence of free time, "go back" to remote times and return to participate in recreational activities that suit each individual's taste, for example in the arts or sports.

To these four structural functions of communication, Fachada (1991) understands to add the function of socialization, which, about its educational potential, allows subjects to integrate into groups, through the dissemination of information and results experienced by some.

At the same time, and as observed by Berlo (1985), interaction also appears as the desired objective, within the scope of human communication. The state of interdependence between sender and receiver, in which each influences the other, is a sequence of action and reaction, in which each message influences the response given to it. At the same time, we strive to assume social roles: we try to put ourselves in the other person's role, to understand the world as they understand it.

The final level of this complex interdependence is then interaction, that is, the mutual performance of empathic behaviors. It is interactive communication, in which people try to predict how the other will react. Its purpose is the full ability to anticipate and behave according to the joint needs of both participants in the communication process.

Interaction thus appears as "*the ideal (…), the goal of human communication*" (idem: 130), despite the great effort required to make much of man's social effort reflect the attempt to find substitutes for it. It is, however, undeniable that our ability to influence increases as we participate in an interactive situation: source and receiver, as distinct entities, lose meaning, and the communication process assumes itself as such in all its fullness: a continuum, in that beginning and end, sender and receiver, are permanently confused and changing roles.

3. Communication barriers

Introducing, as we have just seen, interaction as the central objective of human communication, the truth is that this ideal is not always achieved; We understand that there are numerous factors that, voluntarily or involuntarily, distort the message and, consequently, are obstacles to its effectiveness. Fonseca defines a barrier as a "*real or imaginary (physical or social) barrier of the movement towards a goal*" (1999: 23). Also during the communication process, barriers are arising from the different cultural, economic,

political, and ideological conditions of the sender and receiver, which generate different conditions of understanding on the part of each of these actors: likewise, the language barriers, which are quite common, or noise, prevent the correct reception or understanding of the message.

About this last topic, we would like to emphasize that, with the use of the word noise, we not only mean the existence of too loud sounds that disturb the communication process at a given moment but also - and in a much broader perspective -, any phenomena that lead to message degradation. We consider that the inadequate choice of voice tonality, unreasonable lexicon, improperly chosen visual or symbolic image fit in this definition. Likewise, according to Fonseca (1998), the means used can compromise the effectiveness of communication, for example, if multiple messages occur at the same time, or if these are found to be deficient or null propagated for natural, electrical, or electronic reasons. The origin of interference in the transmission of the message can also be found in the receiver: lack of attention, weak interest, or physical defect create barriers that disturb the communication process.

On this subject, refer Wilcox et al. (1992) as the main barriers to effective communication, aspects such as the divergent life experiences of the interveners, distinctions related to educational level, level of intelligence, interest in the message, linguistic abilities, age, sex, race or social class. Mention is also made to the lack of communicative expertise on the part of the sender or receiver, or the lack of basic information that allows for an understanding of what is transmitted. In this regard, the idea of Bilhim (1996) is pertinent, when he warns that, while for the sender a message may seem transparent as crystal, for the receiver it may represent a great unknown.

The dissemination of information from one individual to another usually generates a phenomenon known as "*message entropy – a natural tendency for a message to dissipate (lose information) as it is disseminated*" (Wilcox et al., 1992: 205). George Gallup, cited by these authors, mentions some obstacles that, in his perspective, make it difficult to absorb information: the complexity of the idea, as the more elaborate it is, the less likely it is that people will understand and take it some attitude; differences from usual standards, as people find it difficult to accept new ideas if they are radically different from what they already know; the need for demonstration - ideas are more easily accepted if they can be demonstrated and proven; the power of vested interests, which may prove strong enough to block innovative concepts; inability to meet existing needs; frequency of attention calls - an idea will only be successful if the audience is constantly reminded about its content.

4. Conclusions

Therefore, it seems clear to us that effective communication implies, above all, that the receiver correctly interprets what the sender intends to transmit. Often, however, this is not the case, due to the constant presence of barriers, which Teixeira (1998) classifies into three large groups: technical, language, and psychological barriers. The author understands the former as related to the temporal opportunity in which communication

takes place, information, and cultural differences. The information must be transmitted at the appropriate time since, for example, even a few minutes' delays could lead to the message not reaching the intended objective. Also, the excess of information channeled to a person or group of people prevents that one from being perfectly understood or treated, which inevitably leads to a reduction in the effectiveness of communication. About cultural differences, we know it is responsible for some gaps or misunderstandings between people from different countries or continents.

We also mentioned language barriers above, and we would like to clarify, according to the author, this idea. In this case, the vocabulary used and the meanings attributed to the words are decisive. The first must take into account the type of receivers it is aimed at, otherwise, it will generate a disinterest in some people to whom the message was intended. An example of this is the use of technical languages, very characteristic of some professional groups or areas of activity, which make it difficult to fully understand what they intend to convey to individuals outside the system. The possibility of different meanings for the same word can also hinder the effectiveness of communications, so prudence and clarity in its use are advisable.

Finally, about barriers, Teixeira argues that they can take various forms, presenting those that he considers being the most significant: information distortion (the greater the more links there is in the communication chain); low level of trust, and open-mindedness between the parties involved in the process; worry or stress that, when reaching high levels, prevent the human being from correctly recording the information transmitted to them; tendency to understand what one wants to hear, which causes deformations in the reception of the message; also differences in perception, in the sense that people with different experiences tend to attribute different interpretations to the same words or situations.

Still, regarding this theme of analysis, the perspective of Berlo (1985) seems pertinent, as it is unusual. Incidentally, the author refers that each role played by individuals within the social system obeys a set of behaviors: what must be done within the scope of this function. However, it would be reductive to make predictions according to the knowledge we have of the role behaviors: the truth is that these can be seen from various points of view. According to Berlo (idem: 152), "*in the analysis of role behaviors, we need to use at least three forms of treatment: role prescriptions, role descriptions, and role expectations*." The author understands that the former can be defined as formal, explicit statements about the behaviors that must be performed by each person within the scope of a specific attribution. Descriptions are the report of the behaviors that, in reality, are performed by the human being in a given role. Finally, expectations are translated into the images that people form about the procedures of other individuals in a given role. Theoretically, and in an ideal system, these three forms referring to a role would be equivalent. However, this is often not the case. If the differences between them present themselves as very distinct or even opposite, communication breakdowns in the system will occur (idem, ibidem). Communication difficulties are then attributable to the existence of ambiguity or conflicts between the sender's behavior and the receiver's expectations in a communication situation. An essential principle for effective

communication is, therefore, the need for the prescriptions, descriptions, and expectations of role behaviors to be in harmony with each other. This makes it possible to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity regarding the social attributions that each individual has in society.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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