



Applied Managerial Communication: Comments from the Perspective of Transactional Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The competence of communication in the activity of a manager has evolved in terms of content and importance over time. In our paper we highlighted the need for specialized books dedicated to managerial communication to offer in the suggestions of behaviours and attitudes in this field a correlation with the theoretical landmarks on which they are based, their lack allowing a limited understanding of the complexity of communication. Based on an application with reference to Transactional Analysis, the discussion of the textbook examples highlights the ease with which concepts such as Ego States, Strokes or Life Positions offer.

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1. Introduction

Economic and social phenomena have a constant and sometimes major impact on the life of the company. Thus, the multitudes of situations that arise as a result of the changes that occur permanently put the management to the test, as it has the duty to ensure the stability that the employees and the institution need. A good level of communication skills can reduce stress levels and diminish or eliminate behaviours that are detrimental to professional goals.

The complexity of the manager's interventions also results from the various attempts to capture the essence of managerial communication, as it can be seen in the following examples quoted by Maurice Imbert, taken from the Procom Club website, which became the first French association dedicated to managerial communication development in 2009. (<http://www.club-procom.fr/association/historique/>): "By "managerial communication" we mean a managerial communication practiced by the manager in order to favour the team's acquisition of the company's strategy and to contribute to its implementation: this implies the involvement of the entire managerial level in a communication aimed at teams." (Procom Club 2007, apud Maurice Imbert, 2015: 7) or "Managerial communication is an approach built on information, arguments, listening and dialogue made by the entire managerial level to make sense of decisions and to mobilize teams in the service of economic and social performance of the company. It translates into management acts in order to involve and motivate employees to engage in the implementation of projects and decisions." (*ibidem*: 8).

Discussing communication as an added value to managerial work is already a well-known fact and this perspective will dominate the vision of the activity of managers, given that the life of the company means interpersonal relationships and the individual is, by his nature, a being that exists through communication. At the level of the institution, any communication action influences each individual. Thus, it is crucial that the manager's work is permanently based on a communication that streamlines the life of the institution, understood from all perspectives: production, interaction, professional development, external image. Any communication actions of the manager have positive or negative intellectual and emotional effects, depending on their quality. Thus, it can lead to an increase in the social competence of employees, seen in a global perspective - understanding the phenomena in the institution, awareness of the need for training and performance, etc., or disinterest in all this. It can also lead to an increase in motivation and satisfaction with belonging at the institution or vice versa.

Various studies conducted in connection with the manager's difficulty in communication (*ibidem*: 14) highlight very important aspects. For example, training the manager from the performance perspective makes him judge his actions in terms of efficiency and will sometimes trigger some reserve when asked to invest time in communication. Another aspect that influences the manager's relationship with the communication activity is the difficult, even paradoxical, situations in which the manager finds himself,

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respectively to do communication work and reduce costs at the same time, to communicate and manage tasks without exceeding the working hours. Another problem is the difficulty to change his perspective on the relationship with his employees, respectively, to move from directing to managing, an activity in which communication is the key to cooperation. The lack of an assessment of communication skills is added as another problem in the manager's vision of communication work.

We believe that one of the solutions that could improve the perspective on communication skills is the way of mastering communication from a conceptual point of view and as a skill. Nativity in communication is an advantage and supports leadership. We believe that in its absence, one way to make it easier to acquire communication skills is to understand communication as an interpersonal process, explained from different theoretical perspectives and less to learn rules to be applied. The discovery of communication through theoretical foundations changes the vision of interpersonal relationships and their approach if there is a desire to evolve from this point of view and managers are, practically, by the nature of their work, obliged to cultivate good quality interpersonal relationships. Nowadays, more than ever, relational skills come to counterbalance the manager's competence based on his functions, namely planning, organizing, leading and controlling, becoming a real challenge for managers or aspirants to managerial practice. We believe that taking suggestions or recommendations for the practice of managerial communication can limit their good intentions, by incomplete understanding of the sources of communication, among which we mention, indicatively, the influence of the social environment on the individual in terms of communication and emotional involvement in the mode of action.

In this paper, we argue for the usefulness of adapting our reactions to various situations based on an understanding of our behaviours and not just with the help of strict textbook recommendations. Thus, we will present annotated examples that illustrate that the rules or suggestions for intervention can be explained by landmarks in the theoretical area of communication, which facilitates their understanding and the recommendation to put them into practice. Our plea for understanding communication as a phenomenon is very firm, as the very young generations of future specialists were formed in a society where human relationships no longer have the connotations they had three or four decades ago, the current vision indicating more pragmatism and less empathy. For our observations we have selected the examples from the chapters Supportive communication and empathic communication in guidance and counselling and Communication in the process of increasing performance and motivation from the paper *Applied managerial communication* (Cândea, Rodica, Cândea, Dan: 1998) which we comment from the perspective of Transactional Analysis.

2. Communication from the perspective of Transactional Analysis

Among the various theoretical supports exploited in the practice of communication and the development of specific skills, Transactional Analysis remains an effective and very practical tool for all those who want quite comfortable and fast solutions in different situations of professional and private life. Developed even after the initial theorizing offered by Eric Berne (see Lassus, R.: 1991; Prutianu, Șt.: 2000; Cardon, A., Lenhardt, V., Nicolas, P.: 2002), Transactional Analysis allows an easier awareness of the way we react, the causes that generate certain behaviours and the possibilities for change, to have a real communication, that is a *win-win* communication, in the content of which we can find: sending messages with the possibility of receiving them according to the intention with which they were transmitted, understanding the other's reactions, a good vision of the relationship for building a partnership, but also cultivating a decent authority, etc. The change proposal, as Eric Berne had put it in his theory, is an optimistic proposition, thus bringing relational comfort, so necessary and so sought after in the contemporary world. This is even more useful in professional life where quality relationships between colleagues are often preferred to a conflicted environment together with a better financial income.

Eric Berne's conclusions were clear about the impact of parental figures during our development as children, whether we are talking about parents, guardians, teachers, etc., or the impact of others who are in an authoritative relationship with us in adulthood. Thus, different verbal reactions and nonverbal behaviours may be the result of the influence that these people have had on us. The Ego States that Eric Berne talks about, described as concrete, observable and relatively structured hypostases of the personality (see Prutianu, 2000: 76), are a fundamental landmark in communication in professional life. We find in these states the adoption of authoritative behaviours to guide others, to support them in different professional contexts, criticism without the right to reply, finding solutions, maintaining enthusiasm, respecting rules or denying them and revolt, etc. They are all behaviours that attest to our intellectual and emotional profile, more precisely, the ability to understand situations and people, the human being in its complexity and, implicitly, our resources of empathy. The Parent - Adult - Child profile is thus the first framework for awareness of our behaviours that can help us to self-knowledge and reflection on how we interact. These hypostases of ours are possible to recognize verbally and non-verbally and a good decoding of them means a chance for better relationships. Below are some brief descriptions of ego states, strokes and life positions as basic elements in understanding how we communicate.

2.1 The Parent Ego State

Covering authoritative behaviours rated positively (the Normative Parent and the Nurturing Parent), or negatively (the Critical Parent and the Saviour Parent), with normative or protective attitudes, critical or compassionate, the Parent State attests to the various actions we can take as an authoritarian figure. These behaviours are relevant to the content of our social life: setting and enforcing rules and regulations, guiding, asking others to perform tasks, appreciating, supporting and helping, protecting, criticizing, or even threatening. Parenthood is a very important component of our relationship and all its facets are important to understand for professional life and managerial communication, for the effects they can generate - guidance, support and motivation, devaluation and inhibition.

2.2 The Adult Ego State

The Adult State, as Eric Berne observed, is indisputably a sum of mature and balanced behaviours, of rational involvement and self-control, of good management of the inner states, of mastery of the crossed situations.

The Adult State is our rational forum that helps us to channel our understanding of the situation we face and to find a solution, to analyse objectively and without emotional involvement. Anchored in reality, autonomous and responsible, our Adult offers us stability through the objective position he brings between the Parent State and the Child State.

His speech is eloquent for asking for information, for finding out the other's point of view, for the interest for collaboration, for proposing ways to act. Rigorous and concerned with comparisons to help him appreciate correctly the facts and events or actions he deals with, he seems neutral to those around him, detached and confident in his vision. His gestures are controlled and neutral, in direct relation to his speech. This state unquestionably requires the practice of the behaviours that characterize it, but it cannot really manifest itself without the personal foundations of self-confidence. It brings satisfaction through the feeling of control over a situation that requires an intervention, but it presents the risk of the impression of coldness in relation to the other, as well as an attenuation of the inner joy.

2.3 The Child Ego State

Childhood is a journey of emotional reactions that have developed under the influence of parental figures and in which we find our behaviours, either as free manifestations, without worrying about social constraints, or as manifestations of decent obedience or humiliation, sometimes rebellious. Positively connoted (the Free Child, the Adapted Child, and the Creative Child) or negatively (the Obedient Child and the Rebel Child), these behaviours are useful to recognize for professional relationships, to be adjusted, as needed, by both the person manifesting them and the manager.

2.4 Strokes

To receive a reaction to our action from somebody else is first and foremost our confirmation as a partner in an interaction; it is a confirmation in itself of our state as human beings that exist socially and not in isolation. Understanding the perception of the other about what we have done is also an element of communication through which we can evaluate ourselves and influence our subsequent actions. Receiving positive or negative reviews, in any known form - congratulations, bonus, diploma, criticism, demotion, etc. is the essence of generating motivation or demotivation. We are dependent on these actions because our evolution is based, through education, on relating to the other's reaction and seeking it as approval or disapproval. As social beings we look for greeting, as a basic element of recognition, we look for appreciation through gratitude or various symbolic elements of the value of our actions, we look for elements of corrective support. All of these reactions, in response to our social and professional behaviour, known as Strokes, in Eric Berne's theory, are a constant in our relationships. They are crucial to our way of acting and are an act of personal responsibility for those who grant them because granting them can produce beneficial or harmful effects, sometimes difficult to anticipate and correct, especially if they are granted systematically.

2.5 Life Positions

The way we perceive ourselves and others, from the perspective of our native or acquired human value - temperament, physical traits, skills, is one of the elements that mark our relationships. The idea of intrinsic value, or gained through training, accompanies us in our behaviours as a label that we apply to ourselves and others. Depending on our standards in communication, we will be pleasant partners if any asset we have does not end up imposing a dominant hierarchical relationship that would cause emotional distress to the other.

The four life positions in Transactional Analysis, namely OK+/OK +, OK +/OK-, OK-/OK+, OK-/OK-, explain the vision we can have about ourselves and the other person. Thus, we can be, as the case may be, in positive and constructive relationships, valuing or devaluing ourselves, the other or both, seeking partnership or hierarchy and domination, assuming the facts or looking for culprits. It is obvious that looking for an OK+/OK+ position is ideal, but its symbolism is not easy to achieve due to the multitude of factors that

influence our relationships. In any case, knowing it as a way to get involved in an interaction is an essential benchmark for our communication actions.

2.6 The benefit of the conceptual understanding of communication

Explaining communication from the perspective of Transactional Analysis helps us to understand what our attitudes are in our way of acting and whether they are beneficial or not, how we can intervene to change what is not useful to us and especially to act through a better understanding of the other. Transactional Analysis helps us to assert our professional roles, to identify people with communication problems, to be aware of the sources of conflicts, to negotiate more effectively when needed. For example, in supporting personal points of view, in discussions on salary issues etc.

Preferring to treat situations from the perspective of Adult - Adult behaviours for any context that requires a brain vision is a definite benefit in professional life. Knowing how to guide and impose with the help of the Normative Parent State, knowing how to encourage with the Nurturing Parent State or knowing how to make room for moments of satisfaction by activating the Free Child State are behaviours that demonstrate not only their usefulness but help increase our ability to adapt and react.

The lack of understanding of the resources of these ways of intervention is a relative obstacle for the necessary and useful reactions in certain contexts, some with a very high stake, such as signing contracts, recruiting top specialists etc. In the following, we present our observations on the selected corpus.

3. Commented textbook suggestions from the perspective of Transactional Analysis

Our comments are focused on highlighting the theoretical content of the textbook suggestions. These present in turn suggestions for the use of certain Ego States, Strokes and Life Positions.

From a quantitative point of view, the number of suggestions regarding the use of Adult State confirms the need for brain action in professional activities. The interest in eliminating the Critical Parent State is also visible, which draws attention to our tendencies to blame the other, instead of focusing on the problem.

Suggestions for using the Adult State	
Examples	Comments
"Attack the problem, not the person." (p. 15)	It is recommended to use the Adult State by appealing to reason, in order to eliminate subjectivity. The result is the need to discuss the problem or the action and not to blame the person.
"Say: "Productivity has decreased due to downtime; the interruption was caused by ..." instead of "You work poorly, you are inefficient and what happens is normal." (p. 15)	
For example, the statement "you are superficial at work" is person-oriented, while the statement "the parts you produced in the last week showed a number of 14 defects, which is not acceptable by our team's standards" is problem-oriented." (p. 19)	
"Say " Let's talk to see how we can solve the problem: I also thought of some solutions ... What's your opinion on this?", not "In order to solve the problem we are going to ..." (p. 16)	The suggestion addresses the need for cooperation, specific to the Adult State, which is motivating for an employee, rather than targeting, coming from a Normative Parent State.
"Say "Your behaviour is bothering me", not "Am I upset? No ... everything is fine" (16)	The suggestion is to focus on the situation, not to deny reality.
"Take responsibility for the statements you make, for the ideas you communicate. (...) say "I took the decision not to approve your proposal because ...", not "Your proposal is interesting, but the council does not want to approve it." (p. 16)	The suggestion calls for accountability, so for the use of the Adult State through the proposal to make decisions.
"... when you are told that "this week's production has dropped", ask, "What do you think were the issues that led to this decline?" instead of saying, "You are inefficient ..." (p. 16)	The suggestion is to use the Adult State by soliciting points of view from the interlocutor without blaming him.
"... a statement like "I don't like the way you dress" is the expression of a personal opinion and will lead to a response of justification or opposition from the interlocutor." (p. 19)	The suggestion aims to eliminate subjectivity from speech, an elimination that is typical of the Adult State.
"To increase the effectiveness of feedback, we advise replacing "why" questions ("why do you feel / think this way"; "why do you do this") with "what" questions ("what do you mean by that"? "what do you mean when you say ...")" (p. 27)	The suggestion is to focus on clarifying and eliminating the possible interpretation of the question as accusatory.
"An address such as (...): "the report you presented to me did not show the weight of product A ... "may be more useful for the purpose of communication." (p. 21)	The suggestion aims to use the Adult State by presenting some details regarding the situation without accusing the perpetrator of the action.
"Reflective probing is useful to encourage the speaker to deepen the analysis of the topic in question: "Do you say that you were disappointed by ...?" (p. 27)	The assessment refers to the use of the Adult State by requesting clarifications that lead to an understanding of the situation.
"... when guiding or advising we must be the owners of the issued messages, to take responsibility for our own statements, confirming that we ourselves, and no one else, are the source of those ideas, opinions and views: In this regard we suggest you avoid formulations such as "they said", "it is considered that ...", "we, the committee, believe that ...", "you could say that ...", "many believe that ..." (p. 24)	The suggestion concerns the intervention with the Adult State by eliminating from the discourse the structures that are partially vague or leave room for interpretations, the Adult State having this particularity to express himself clearly.

Suggestions for using the Normative Parent State	
Examples	Comments
"In guidance and counselling, problem-oriented communication must be correlated with clear standards, rules and habits, not personal opinions." (p. 19)	Suggestion for using a speech that is specific to expressing authority, landmark, and without harming the other person.
"... the expression "your clothing is not in accordance with our business practices" or "each employee is expected to wear a tie and a suit during negotiations with customers" highlights the need for certain standards." (p. 19)	The observation concerns the requests sent to the other with the provision of guidelines to direct his actions, specific to the Normative Parent State, with authority but without aggression.
"... given that employees have different individual needs and goals, different personalities and behaviours, the manager must coordinate their efforts towards common goals of the organization." (p. 38)	The suggestion aims to use the Normative Parent State by carrying out coordination activities and targeting the goal. The manager thus confirms the landmark role attributable to this state.

Suggestions for using the Nurturing Parent State	
Examples	Comments
"Listen supportively." (p. 16)	The suggestion shows the need to focus on the needs of the other, specific to the Nurturing Parent State.
"Guidance therefore responds to the problems of ability (knowledge, skills, experience), competence, and the approach must be of the type "I can help you solve the problem, to do better." (p. 18)	The observation concerns the way in which the other person is given the help he needs, respectively, with understanding and support, without showing any superiority or compassion.
Answers that deviate somewhat from the discussion are recommended when the speaker needs a factor of comparison, encouragement, empathy and support ("I understand you, because it happened to me too"; "everything will be fine, because even in other cases ...")." (p. 26)	The suggestion concerns the empathic discourse, typical for the Nurturing Parent State.

Suggestions for avoiding the Critical Parent State	
Examples	Comments
"... formulations like "you should know that ...", "you should realize that"... can convey to the interlocutor the feeling of incompetence, unjustified naivety, lack of intelligence." (p. 19)	The suggestion aims to eliminate the Critical Parent State by warning about the potentially offensive discourse, characteristic of this state.
"Statements like "you're lazy", "you don't care about the interests of the group" results from an evaluative attitude and generates the defensiveness or opposition of the recipient of the message, and the probable reaction will be to deny or disregard the content of the received message." (p. 19)	The suggestion refers to accusations and their non-constructive consequences, typical for the Critical Parent State.
"... the change that is required should not be considered only the responsibility of the interlocutor ("I don't like the way you deal with things, so either you change or you no longer work here.") The solution and responsibility for change are common (we are both interested so that things go better, so let's see what we can do about it." (p. 20)	The suggestion concerns the need to change the Critical Parent-type behaviour that focuses on radical and one-way solutions.
"When guiding or advising, we should avoid general, absolute statements, such as "never respond to group requests" because the reaction will be (...) typical of the defensive attitude." (p. 21)	The remark concerns the tendency of exaggeration and negative generalization manifested by the Critical Parent State, a behaviour that does not support an employee in case of guidance and counselling.
"Categorical statements such as "if not ..., then ...," replacing the concrete, specific description of the problem, are also not recommended, because the probable reactions of the admonished person will be defensive (...)" (p. 21)	The clarification refers to the lack of alternative practiced by the Critical Parent State and the lack of discussions that would bring a jointly decided and agreed solution.
"Rigidity in communication can be manifested, for example, by a communication that leaves no room for alternatives or for any contribution of the interlocutor in the communication process or if we do not consider or accept any point of view other than ours." (p. 22)	The observation refers to the classic attitude of the Critical Parent State, through which the imposition and lack of any negotiation for solving the problem is practiced, an attitude that is completely unfavourable to communication and relationship.
"Avoid referring to past behaviours, old or general grievances. Don't blame; (...)" (p. 58)	The observation concerns the need to abandon the accusatory behaviour, specific to the Critical Parent State.

Suggestions for giving Strokes	
Examples	Comments
"Validate the interlocutor, recognize his importance as an individual, regardless of the opinions he expresses or his value system." (p. 16)	The suggestions refer to giving positive Strokes that support the emotional sphere of the interlocutor by accepting opinions and appreciating his actions.
"The communication that makes the interlocutor feel recognized, understood, accepted and valued will give him the feeling of validation." (p. 23)	
"Communication that validates the interlocutor creates a sense of personal value	

Suggestions for giving Strokes	
Examples	Comments
and self-confidence that contributes to his motivation." (p. 23)	
"Indifference is manifested (...) by the use of impersonal words" "(a person should ..." instead of "you should ..." or by not paying attention to the discussion (e.g., by performing other activities in parallel. (...) "(p. 22)	The observation concerns the granting of negative strokes, with classic emotional consequences for such situations, respectively, the feeling that the other is guilty or does not matter.
"The subordinate must not be left with the impression that everything he does is not good because it will demoralize him." (p. 58)	The suggestions address the need not to give conditional negative acknowledgments without making the necessary corrective suggestions to help the subordinate work as expected.
Pay attention to the accuracy of the subordinate's understanding of how the behaviour can be corrected: thus avoid the subordinate believing that "whatever he does is not good" or that he will not repeat the negative behaviour, but will not know what to do next." (p. 58)	

Suggestions for using the OK + / OK + life position	
Examples	Comments
"Communication in both directions generates a team atmosphere and is an implicit result of equal and flexible communication. The interlocutor feels important and appreciated if he is asked questions, given time to answer, and encouraged to take an active part in the conversation." (p. 23)	The suggestion addresses the need to use an attitude of balance in the relationship, elimination of hierarchy and abandonment of rigidity, specific to the life position OK+/OK+.
"Take responsibility for what you say, tell your interlocutor that you appreciate him, that you are willing to invest in him, that you are acting on an equal footing." (p. 24)	The suggestion concerns the need to look for the life position OK+/OK+, in which the other is valued by the interest for an egalitarian relationship.

4. Conclusions

In our paper we proposed to discuss the need to understand communication using theoretical landmarks, with an application on the support provided by Transactional Analysis. From Eric Berne's conceptual ensemble we referred exclusively to the use of Ego States, Strokes and Life Positions. The commented examples serve the idea we support, namely that the suggestions for intervention in managerial communication must be doubled by an understanding of the phenomenon of communication, without which some of these suggestions cannot be understood in their complexity. For example, the idea of protecting a person when criticized. From the point of view of temperament or social evolution, a person may consider that harsh criticism is correct because the criticized person would not change his behaviour otherwise. He doesn't understand or feel the idea of "protecting". This can be a serious mistake, with special emotional risks for the person being criticized. Different aspects are taken into account here, such as the age of the person, the repetitiveness of the mistake and its severity etc. The subject is to be discussed from the perspective of using the Critical Parent State.

Another example might be the tendency to impose measures without consulting those performing certain tasks. While it is clear that in many cases it is necessary to impose action, this is not universally true. The idea of authority must be understood correctly and it does not exclude respect for the subordinate or the discussion of his ideas. We are talking here about the conscious use of the Normative Parent State or Adult State.

Our comments on the examples taken from the chapters Supportive communication and empathic communication in guidance and counselling and Communication in the process of increasing performance and motivation, from the paper *Applied managerial communication* (Cândea, Rodica, Cândea, Dan, 1998), illustrate the relationship between textbook suggestions and theoretical landmarks and support the idea that doubling with explanations from the theoretical area of behavioural proposals in managerial communication facilitates the consolidation of the vision on the communication process and the quality of intervention in various situations.

As recognized by experts, Eric Berne's theory does not impose modes of action, but leaves the person free to choose what he considers appropriate for a given situation. This supports the idea of the need for as spontaneous interventions as possible to ensure a more natural communication and expression, so as not to leave the impression that people "speak like a book".

The analysis I have proposed is part of a broader research approach that looks at the possibilities of improving communication in the institutional space, especially in the manager-employee relationship, to increase the quality of the relational climate, with the effect of motivation and loyalty to institution.

Our comments are especially useful for beginner or trainee managers, but also for experienced managers. The thinking we support favours the application of measures at the institutional level for the training of staff with management positions, but also of other employees, because communication must be achieved through the existence of common landmarks as a whole and not only at the level of those who must put it into practice in their coordination activity. It is also a condition for employees to understand what is expected of them from this point of view.

Given that among the managerial desideratum we find the idea of having satisfied employees, who should receive recognition for their work, to be a part in making decisions, communication work must remain a permanent concern for the managers. More than any other employees, they should self-adjust their communication and constantly self-assess from this point of view. The quality of the communication they practice can become a solid component for their professional success.

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