New directions in research on well-being: psychological process in everyday contexts

Irene Petruccelli

Rome, March 30\textsuperscript{th} 2021
Paul Watzlawick (July 25, 1921 – March 31, 2007) was an Austrian-American family therapist, psychologist, communication theorist, and philosopher.

A theoretician in communication theory and radical constructivism, he commented in the fields of family therapy and general psychotherapy. Watzlawick believed that people create their own suffering in the very act of trying to fix their emotional problems.

He was one of the most influential figures at the Mental Research Institute and lived and worked in Palo Alto, California.
You cannot not communicate. Every behavior is a kind of communication. Because behavior does not have a counterpart (there is no anti-behavior), it is not possible not to communicate.

— Paul Watzlawick —
Social communication

We have to start with some simple properties of communication that have fundamental interpersonal implications:

1. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF NOT COMMUNICATING
2. THE CONTENT AND RELATIONSHIP LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION
3. THE PUNCTUATION OF THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
4. DIGITAL AND ANALOGIC COMMUNICATION
5. SYMMETRICAL AND COMPLEMENTARY INTERACTION
Paul Watzlawick:

“The belief that one’s own view of reality is the only reality is the most dangerous of all delusions”

How real is real?
Confusion
Disinformation
Communication
1. *One cannot not communicate*:

Every behavior is a form of communication.

Because behavior does not have a counterpart (there is no anti-behavior), it is impossible not to communicate.

Even if communication is being avoided (such as the unconscious use of non-verbals or symptom strategy), that is a form of communication. "Symptom strategy" is ascribing our silence to something beyond our control and makes no communication impossible.

Examples of symptom strategy are sleepiness, headaches, and drunkenness. Even facial expressions, digital communication, and being silent can be analyzed as communication by a receiver.
2. Every communication has a content and relationship aspect:

All communication includes, apart from the plain meaning of words, more information. This information is based on how the speaker wants to be understood and how he himself sees his relation to the receiver of information. **Relationship** is the command part of the message or how it is non-verbally said. **Content** is the report or what is said verbally.

Being able to interpret both of these aspects is essential in understanding something that a communicator said.

The relational aspect of interaction is known as *metacommunication*. **Metacommunication** is communication about communication.

Relationship messages are always the most important element in communication.
3. The nature of a relationship is dependent on the punctuation of the partners communication procedures:

Both the sender and the receiver of information structure the communication flow differently and therefore interpret their own behavior during communicating as merely a reaction on the other's behavior (i.e., every partner thinks the other one is the cause of a specific behavior).

To punctuate a communication means to interpret an ongoing sequence of events by labeling one event as the cause and the following event as the response.

In a situation with communication, if one thing happens, something else always happens.
3. The nature of a relationship is dependent on the punctuation of the partners communication procedures:

For example, a female in a relationship with a male is feeling depressed. The male in the relationship with the female feels guilty. One who observes this situation might ask, "Is she depressed because of his guilt, or does he feel guilty because of her depression?"
3. The nature of a relationship is dependent on the punctuation of the partners’ communication procedures:

In a case where the husband neglects his wife and she does not take care of herself, we will have:
3. The nature of a relationship is dependent on the punctuation of the partners communication procedures:

The husband only perceives the triads 2-3-4, 4-5-6, 6-7-8 in which his behaviour (red arrow) is simply a response, a consequence, to that of his wife (green arrow). The wife instead, punctuates the sequences of events according to the triads 1-2-3, 3-4-5, 5-6-7, 7-8-9 and sees herself only in the act of reacting to the behavior of her husband, not to determine it.
In this case, a conflict may arise on what is believed to be the cause and what is considered the effect of the mutual behaviours, when instead the interaction is circular!

Therefore, none of the versions of the partners can be considered correct (the husband neglects his wife because she has no self-care and the wife has no self-care because the husband neglects her)!
• Another word frequently used in the Interactional View is *double-bind*.
• Someone in a double-bind, is a person trapped by expectations.
• The powerful party requests that the low-power party act symmetrically.
4. Human communication involves both digital and analog modalities:

This axiom refers back to the use of non-verbals and system strategy explained in the first axiom.

It is mostly related to the digital content of communication within a relationship.
5. Inter-human communication procedures are either symmetric or complementary:

This axiom focuses on metacommunication with two main components called symmetrical and complementary interchange.

Symmetrical interchange is an interaction based on equal power between communicators.

Complementary interchange is an interaction based on differences in power.

Within these two interchanges there are three different ways they can be used:

• one-up,
• one-down,
• and one-across.
With a one-up communication, one communicator attempts to gain control of an exchange by dominating the overall communication.

A one-down communication has the opposite effect. A communicator attempts to yield control of an interaction or submit to someone.

The final message is a one-across communication. This communication moves to neutralize a situation.

This is also called transitory if only one communicator is attempting this style.

When two communicators use the same style of one-up, one-down, or one-across, it is symmetrical.

If they are opposing one another it is complementary.

This axiom allows us to understand how an interaction can be perceived by the styles a communicator is using.
Video:

• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jT7vNeb0apw&t=36s
Non-Verbal Communication (NVC)

Definition

“All communication other than that involving words and language”

• This is fine but could include everything from animal communication to films.
• For our purposes we will use a more restricted definition:

“Bodily communication, other than words and language”
Forms

1. Different categories (or types) of NVC

2. The functions (or uses) of NVC
Relationship between NVC, Language & Culture

When travelling, we do not, on the whole, make the assumption that everyone will understand our first and preferred language.

Most of us accept we must either learn a new language or rely entirely on verbal signals for communication.

We assume we will have no difficulty in decoding non-verbal clues.

We need to be aware of the enormous range and diversity of non-verbal behaviour.
NVC, Language & Culture

• Even in the secure territory of your own familiar culture, care is needed in the interpretation of non-verbal clues

• Jumping to conclusions about meanings of non-verbal clues can be dangerous
Paralanguage consists of the non-verbal elements that accompany speech. It includes:

- The way we speak (also known as prosodic features)
- Volume, pitch, intonation, speed of delivery, articulation, rhythm
- The sounds we make other than language
- Laughter, crying, yawning, sighing, screeching, coughing
- Filled pauses such as ‘Mmmm’, ‘Ahhh’, ‘Umm’
- Unfilled pauses
Categorisation of NVC – Physical Appearance

• Clothing, hairstyle, make-up, jewellery, tattoos, piercings, glasses, facial hair, accessories such as bags

• You only have to think of the huge industries associated with the above examples to recognise the cultural significance of physical appearance
Categorisation of NVC – Physical Appearance

- Many societies had (and some still do have) highly regulated codes of dress, often linked to rank and status.
- It is the body’s capacity to communicate aspects of an individual’s identity which makes us so aware of our physical appearance.
Categorisation of NVC – Physical Appearance

• Self expression in contemporary culture is also limited by requirements to wear uniforms or to observe dress codes.

• Not necessarily restricted to schools and public services.

• Many corporations and organisations expect employees to communicate a corporate rather than an individual identity.
Further Categories of NVC - Activity

- Body movement (kinesics)
- Closeness (proxemics)
- Touching
- Eye movement
- Smells
Body Movement - Kinesics

- Gesture, facial expression, posture, head nodding, orientation
- Emblems – gestures with specific cultural meanings attached
- Illustrators reinforce words of speakers
- Adapters are unconscious gestures to relieve stress or boredom
- Posture is heavily laden with value judgements