

Holistic Information Transmission (HIT)

A Comprehensive Guide to Holistic Communication

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Contents

I.

Introduction

II.

Information Transmission

III.

Incomplete or Distorted Communication

IV.

HIT: The New Paradigm in Communication

I.

Introduction

Holistic Information Transmission (HIT) is a set of tools destined to:

- Observe the communication process
- Remedy incomplete communication
- Define the scope of holistic communication
- Teach the principles of holistic communication

For many of my readers and seminar participants it's quite a strange expression: *Holistic Information Transmission* or HIT. The term is my own creation. HIT describes what in my experience are the most important elements in communication:

- Transmission of information
- Holistic

For those among you who like fashionable reading I remember the recent bestseller *The Celestine Prophecy*. Much in this wonderful book actually concerns holistic communication. You can translate holistic communication with complete or total communication. However, these terms only circumscribe the term holistic that actually says much more. Many of you easily agree with my first pretension, i.e. that communication is a transmission of information. But why, you may ask, should it be *holistic*?

Let me first point out what I mean by *holistic*. To make sure that we communicate clearly from the beginning, we should be correct about the terms we use. Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines 'holistic' as follows:

ho•lis•tic : relating to or concerned with integrated wholes or complete systems rather than with the analysis or treatment of separate parts < ~ medicine > < ~ ecology >

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My look at the communication process is indeed concerned with an integrated whole. I consider communication as a complete system rather than analyzing or treating separate parts like the receiver horizon, environmental factors, and such. After years of observing communication and working with groups, I found that communication is something very intuitive, something that can hardly be learnt through theoretical classes that treat the different parts of the communication process. When we communicate, we do it automatically with our whole mindbody, our *whole being*. We do not usually split off one part, i.e. the verbal message, from other messages such as our body language. We may do this as an exercise in a seminar, but we never do it out there in real life.

Since this is so, learning communication without practicing it immediately is very ineffective. Even more so is the practice dependent upon so many factors that are pertinent when we communicate that practice alone, without competent feedback, is not very valuable to make significant progress in the skill of communicating.

Therefore I designed the RICCA Communication Training which is exercising communication with two built-in feedback factors, one from the side of the communication partner and one from the side of the facilitator.

The RICCA training does not yet incorporate HIT, simply because I designed HIT later than RICCA. Only in practicing RICCA I could see the necessity for HIT, for an additional element in the RICCA training. An element that however is so important that it changed the whole training!

You may argue that *Information Transmission* sounds like a reductionist concept of communication. Of course, we communicate emotions, too, not only information! This is why I use the adjective *holistic*. In a way, if I say holistic communication, I use a pleonasm. Communication, natural communication, is per se holistic.

The problem comes in fact from reducing communication to mere information transmission. This is not my invention! It is our (sad) reality in many, mostly professional, environments, and very often in teams. For some reason or the other, the human contact has cooled down to such an extent that communication often is *but* information transmission, or is meant to be.

Because the paradox is that the reductionism does not work. The human element, our emotions, our whole irrationality cannot be swept under the carpet. As a result, if we try to do it, we get the following:

- Incomplete or distorted communication;
- Cold, dehumanized communication environment;
- Negative emotions through the repression of feelings;
- More mistrust and insecurity, less trust and security;
- Enhanced irrationality through repression of irrationality;
- Lack of communicating *subtle* information;
- Lack of cross-cultural communication.

II.

Information Transmission

Many a reader of this text may silently nod when going through this little list. Sounds familiar?

Well, then please take a moment and follow me further in the analysis of the reasons for those seemingly common day-to-day problems. And let me precede our little excursion with the remark that in my opinion communication problems are neither common plagues to be accepted without shaking, nor day-to-day necessities.

Let us now look together on the various problems fields, using our special HIT enhanced RICCA glasses.

Deprive communication of essential elements and you get what is daily reality in so many companies and organizations all over the world: incomplete or distorted communication. Why?

Communication is naturally a complete process, a continuum, an indivisible whole. We know it better from our communicating with close friends or relatives. How many times did it happen that you knew in advance exactly the question your friend or spouse was going to ask you one minute later? And how many times did both of you begin to formulate the same sentence in exactly the same moment - so that you stopped a moment, laughing?

When this happens, you know that the communication with the other person is perfect. We can also say that this is complete, whole or holistic communication because all the factors that can be possibly part of communication are present.

It means that also emotions, feelings and intuitions are communicated at an underlying level, and that a part of the communication happens silently, telepathically.

In all other cases, i.e. where one of those elements are missing, we have to deal with incomplete or distorted communication. Before I treat more in detail what means incomplete and what means distorted communication, let us first have a look with the end in mind, to paraphrase Stephen Covey. If we want to achieve realizing holistic communication, we must first have an idea what this means in detail. So we will first enumerate some essential elements that are part of a holistic communication process:

1. Intention to communicate

The inner will to communicate is certainly essential even if we do not often reflect about it. And you can imagine situations where communication is felt 'an obligation' so that people communicate at an outside level only without really wanting to communi-

cate. In this case the communication sure is incomplete and will quickly become distorted.

2. Integrated body and mind

In order to communicate holistically, our body and mind must be integrated, i.e. our awareness must passively or actively encompass our bodily expressions such as our body language.

3. Spontaneous expression

Holistic communication is impossible for those who want to rigidly control life and relationships. Even if they know about the importance of holistic communication and have even studied communication processes, they will have a hard time to achieve the total of HIT because the subconscious mind cannot be controlled. It blocks at the slightest attempt to subdue it. Therefore spontaneity is an essential element of holistic communication.

This little overview over the three essential elements of holistic communication gives us the necessary frame of reference to look now at the cases where holistic communication is impeded.

III.

Incomplete or Distorted Communication

Incomplete communication

The first category of non-holistic communication is incomplete communication. A communication process is not complete, not whole (and thus not holistic) if essential elements are missing. Those elements are for example:

- Lacking intention to communicate;
- Lacking integration of subconscious processes;
- Lacking awareness of body language;
- Lacking spontaneity;
- Lacking openness because of fear or general anxiety;
- Lacking self-esteem;

There are certainly more possible cases but most of them will fit into this six-fold list of lacking elements.

Distorted communication

The second category of non-holistic communication is distorted communication. In the case of distorted communication, the communication process has deteriorated, either because of lacking elements or other (outside) reasons. We have to keep in mind that human beings want to communicate. We can even add that the whole, holistic communication is the natural version of communication, because if there are no lacking elements, it will come about spontaneously.

You may have wondered why with children your communication seems to be so much easier and so much more complete, subject to less strain and anxiety. It seems to come right from the heart. If you feel that, it is a sign that the communication was holistic. The heart is the seat not only of our emotions but also of our mind, the integrated universal mind that is connected to our Higher Self. Since this is so, lacking elements deteriorate communication because every incomplete communication creates frustration, if we feel this frustration consciously or not. The frustration leads to negative feelings, anxiety and a general defensive attitude that automatically deteriorates the communication process as a whole.

Cold, dehumanized communication environment

The next circumstance why HIT is impeded from happening is a cold and generally dehumanized communication environment.

This can be the general atmosphere at the workplace or in a company when there is not much care about social relations or, as it is indeed the case in some companies, human contacts in general are looked upon with suspicion.

But there is also a new and interesting example for this kind of environment: the Internet. In my experience, it is extremely difficult to establish a warm and human communication through

e-mail contacts. Honestly, I cannot imagine holistic communication on the Web. However, all depends on us, the users of the Web. Once we are ready to it, we can achieve it, together. At the present moment, my experience is that most people, especially from the USA, exhibit in their mail replies the following characteristics:

- Impersonal or lacking addressing;
- Lack of emotions or lack of expressing emotions;
- Anxiety and/or aggressivity;
- Generally defensive attitude;

The reasons for this kind of attitude? Lacking basic trust, paranoid fears, negative gossip about "dangers" on the Web, personal and/or collective insecurity.

I once provided a free online counseling service: '*EMotion*'. EMotion was a cost-free email service in which I put myself at service for counseling on emotional problems.

That service was thought to be a kind of email hotline. I expected people to send me mail about their emotional problems they might encounter in their family, their relationships, their work, etc. I promised users to help as far as I could to give support and advice, and all this for no charge.

However, since during more than two years nobody ever sent me one single mail or used this service, I dropped it. Now judge by

yourself what might be the possible reasons for this dead silence I encountered?

If you look at the list two paragraphs above you see possible reasons for the failure of this service. At the time, I was not yet aware of all the implications of holistic communication or its contrary: incomplete or distorted communication. This is why I pretend that most of the communication on the Web or via e-mail is either incomplete or distorted.

After analyzing the possible reasons of EMotion's failure, I became aware that talking spontaneously about emotional problems is essentially part of a holistic communication process and, as such, only possible if there is openness, trust, intention to communicate and a warm, empathic atmosphere in which the communication is imbedded.

It is no secret that the Web is a virtual space, not a real one, despite the fact that, in my opinion at least, it is real, too, because it has created its own reality. But anyway, this space is computerized and felt by most people as being cold and dehumanized. At least at a subconscious level, this could be the major reason for most people's reserve and hesitation to open up to true and holistic communication.

Negative emotions through the repression of feelings

The next element that we have to consider because it renders holistic communication impossible, are negative emotions. Negative emotions are for a major part created by the repression of feelings. How can?

Please try to observe this process within yourself, and not just to intellectually understand what I am saying. One of the most essential reasons why human beings want to communicate is to convey feelings or emotions. If you observe people talking, you see that they derive the most satisfaction from communicating about the family, love, friendship, exciting adventures, travel, new encounters, etc., thus about emotional values and experiences, or feelings.

We have to communicate a lot about technical things, too, about administrative matters, job questions, regulations, professional or academic matters. But we do not really derive pleasure from that kind of communication. What we value in communication is first of all the exchange of emotions and emotional experiences, and the sharing of feelings about things or experiences with people.

Now, what happens if we feel our communication gets too much centered upon professional or academic matters or, more

generally put, deprived of the exchange of feelings and sharing emotional values and experiences? We feel frustrated at a very deep-down level, we feel hurt or even begin to lose self-esteem. Or we even feel dehumanized, isolated, sick or abandoned. We may experience strong anxieties, similar to the anxiety of a small child that has been abandoned by his/her parents.

In a society or cultural environment where the repression of emotions is part of 'good behavior' such as the Western, especially the American, professional culture, a vacuum of emotional communication is daily experience, and leads to all (and more) of the before-mentioned pathological phenomena.

To put it in a general formula, we can say that the repression of emotions leads to negative emotions or, in terms of energy, to stale or stagnated energy and energy exchange, and thus to a blockage of exchanging positive energy which is an essential part of holistic communication. Please look at the following game of words:

- Holistic
- Hostile

The two words are very similar and use almost the same letters. However, they express exactly opposite phenomena. We can say that holistic communication as the natural process, when it

becomes stale, blocked or otherwise rendered impossible, engenders hostile communication. Furthermore, a communication environment that is bound to be holistic yet overwhelmed by elements that block holistic communication becomes a hostile communication environment.

Therefore, we have a choice. We can choose integrated, peaceful, holistic communication or hostile communication. *Tertium non datur.*

More mistrust and insecurity, less trust and security

This point is obvious after the preceding explanations. If non-holistic communication is always hostile in a way, it is obvious that it lacks trust and security.

However, it is important that we realize the importance of trust and security as essential elements of holistic communication. If you look at the results only, affirming that a particular communication is either holistic or hostile, you may overlook what essentially makes it holistic or hostile. One of the points that are essential in determining a communication becoming holistic or hostile is trust and security. Holistic communication without trust and security is impossible. On the other hand, hostile communication is typically characterized by the absence of trust and secu-

rity. (By 'security' I understand the feeling to be secure with the other person or institution, organization, etc.). If I feel threatened or fear that the natural or legal person I would like to communicate with will overpower me, I will certainly not establish holistic communication with her. Because I will start from a defensive point of departure, and my basic orientation will be one of (silent, passive or active) hostility.

Enhanced irrationality through the repression of irrationality

This point really sounds confusing. I know. It's one of life's paradoxes. And it sounds even more paradoxical if I tell you that this sentence would mean exactly the same if I say: Enhanced irrationality through the repression of rationality. It is not a typing mistake. *For the result of repressing irrationality is repressing rationality.* With other words: we cannot be rational if we do not allow us to be irrational. More generally put: a culture that represses irrationality by stressing too much on rationality becomes deeply irrational. Shocking example: Germany's Third Reich.

Hitler's propaganda and his whole murderous system was deeply and utterly irrational. However it had grown in a culture that generally overstresses rationality and rational behavior giving very little space for irrational forms of being or behaving. Un-

fortunately in our modern world fascist regimes are still possible because the masses that have lost their trust in rationality long for irrational values.

Now let us switch from politics back to our modern company culture. What is the problem there?

It is common belief that emotions should be left at the entry door, the illusion that communication at work could take place in an emotional vacuum. Why?

Because many managers think that employees are more attentive and focused on their work if they spare out the private sector, if they communicate in a sterile environment which allows communication only about professional matters. Otherwise, it is thought they would mess up the whole place with private gossip and forget about working... But when you insist asking about the effectiveness of the communication process in the company, general managers then often shrug their shoulders.

In those companies there usually is a lot of miscommunication or just lacking communication. With the result that mistakes are discovered much too late.

What about changing the communication culture, the communication philosophy, in your company...?, I then propose, looking most of the time in wide open eyes.

- *What do you mean?*
- *I mean that you should admit irrational communication in order to allow rational communication to appear.*
- *I don't understand what you mean. Can you talk more clearly?*

Then I explain the whole thing and at the end we agree about a pilot project or communication seminar. The problem about miscommunication is almost always one of irrational factors disturbing or distorting communication that was meant or intended to be rational. However, this happens only if irrational communication is repressed.

For example, if in a company it is not allowed to openly talk about work conditions, the only way to communicate a message that would sound like I do not agree with the present work conditions is through irrational behavior such as sickness, slow or sluggish work, accidents, sudden temper tantrums towards colleagues or superiors, and more of this kind.

This is so because communication is so vital a thing for humans that it cannot be repressed. If verbal expression is not allowed, the body talks. And we know all this. *Violence body talk when verbal communication has failed.* War is such a way of communicating. Strikes at work are such a way of communicating.

Where irrationality is allowed and irrational thought communicated, the communication as a whole wins in frankness, honesty, truthfulness and beauty. It enhances trust, confidence and self-esteem and lets people feel closer to each other. It is a *conditio sine qua non* for holistic communication.

Lack of communicating 'subtle' information

What is subtle information? With subtle information I circumscribe all information that we get through informal, unofficial, irrational or paranormal channels. Such as:

- Gut feelings
- Intuitions
- Dreams
- Visions
- A 'sixth sense'

In a work environment or team where subtle information is either ridiculed or inappropriate, considered as impolite or even obscene, very valuable sources of information and thus of communication are blocked. In my experience companies where I find a generally negative or belittling attitude towards subtle information and communication lack creativity and effectiveness. They may try very hard and be as tough as possible in the market,

but they will hardly ever win the top! Especially in our times of change and restructuration, new creative approaches are so vital that every plus in subtle communication is a real gain for every company and will show highly positive long-term results.

Lack of cross-cultural communication

Where people from different cultures work together in teams, especially direction teams, cross-cultural communication is of vital importance for the company.

After years of work as a corporate trainer in Indonesia, a country with presently a high number of expatriate executives in company direction teams, I can say that many companies there are not less than close to disasters in a near future if they do not develop more awareness about the intrinsic value of cross-cultural communication training.

The general response I got from the top level of large multinational hotel chains and other service industries in Bali was one of ignorance, incompetence, arrogance and indifference toward the problem of cross-cultural communication. Indonesians or Balinese themselves, in the rare cases that they were at the top company level, or within national companies or government banks or agencies, showed much more concern and openness regard-

ing the cross-cultural communication problems in their companies and interest for respective trainings.

This despite the fact that in Indonesia there is generally not yet a budget allocated for a general human skill training, a training that goes beyond mere professional skills training. However, this is going to change in the future since the awareness about the problem is present. So much the more I was shocked to see Westerners at the top level of the industry in Indonesia indulging in self-admiration and blaming the *locals* for their own incompetence, their lack of leadership skills and their almost unbelievable arrogance.

This work taught me an invaluable lesson: the insight into the old paradigm of management within cross-cultural environments and the need to implementing all the factors that make out the new paradigm into the new company culture that has begun to grow a bit everywhere in the world.

My RICCA training and especially HIT are the direct creative fruits of these lessons.

IV.

HIT: The New Paradigm in Communication

Since holistic communication cannot be exactly defined, just as love or life, I would like to leave you at this point of our discussion which has at least given you an idea of *Holistic Information Transmission* as a new paradigm in communication, and a new approach to communication training.

My task in this writing was to enumerate the circumstances that impede holistic communication from arising. We have also seen that holistic communication as a natural process comes up spontaneously, once all the factors that inhibit it, are removed.

The most important to recall is our need for serious awareness about communication being something that is

- Complex;
- Vital;
- Highly important for survival;
- A skill that can be learned and improved.