Chapter #26

COMMUNICATION: MOTIVATIONS, GENDER AND STYLE

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ABSTRACT

The major aspects of communication include the communicating individual, the addressee, and the style of communication which can be more objective or subjective. The present study examines the role of the communicator's motivation, and of the gender of the communication and of the addressee in regard to the communication style. The motivation was assessed in terms of the cognitive orientation approach (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1982) which assumes that motivation is a function of beliefs that may not be completely conscious. It may be oriented towards sharing or towards withdrawal. The communication style was assessed by the Kreitler meaning system as more objective and interpersonally-shared means or more personal-subjective ones. The hypothesis was that the communication style is determined by one's motivation and by the gender of the communicator and addressee. The participants were 70 undergraduates. The tool was a cognitive orientation questionnaire. The experimental task was a story that had to be recounted. The narratives were coded for communication style. The data was analyzed by the Cox proportional hazards model and regression analysis. The time until the communication style appeared was predicted by the communicator's motivation and the addressee's gender; the communication style by the communicator's motivation and the communicator's gender.

Keywords: communication, style, sharing, motivation, cognitive orientation, meaning, gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a complex multi-functional process used in different contexts for an ever-increasing number of goals. Major components of communication include the communicating individual or communicator, the recipient of the communication or the addressee, the contents of the communication, and the style of communicating (Barnlund, 2008; Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2021). In other words, the main constituents of the event of communication are focused on *who* communicates, to *whom*, *what,* and *how*. The interplay between the mentioned factors turns communication into a dynamic complex which is almost continually changing. Within this complex, it may be possible to focus on one or another of the components in order to assess its relative contribution to the total effect in the final stage. Each one of the components may be considered as focal and serving as the platform in which the impact of the other components is reflected, manifested, and activated. Communication style is a factor of prime importance due to its central position in relation to the communicator, the addressee, and the content.

The present study deals with examining the determinants and role of the communication style. Communication styles have a strong impact on the outcomes of the act of communication. Communication styles are defined as the manner in which an individual habitually presents or expresses the information which constitutes the core of the communication. It is usually regarded as a behavior which is determined both by one's personality and the prevailing circumstances (Communication Style, 2021).

However, the use of one or another communication style depends on the context and is usually adapted to different functions and situations, such as the workplace, teaching, family, romantic meetings, or social gathering (Kuria, 2019; Wegner, Roy, Gorman, & Ferguson, 2018). Different communication styles have been defined, such as aggressive, passive-aggressive, passive, expressive, manipulative, challenging, and submissive (De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Sieberg, Gameren, & Vlug, 2009). The two communication styles dealt with in the present context refer to sharing information or withholding information. The major reasons for this choice were first, that they concern directly the goal of communication which focuses on information, e.g., its acquisition, presentation, elaboration, or storage. Secondly, these styles were studied in the context of schizophrenics and control subjects (Kreitler, Schwartz, & Kreitler, 1987), and were identified also by interviewing subjects about the goals of communication in neutral social contexts (see Kreitler, 2021b, chapter 5). Thirdly, these styles were found to be a common component in different listings of communication styles or inventories, under different titles, such as expressive, promoting socializing, emotional and personal versus reporting, analyzing, technical or systematic (de Vries et al., 2009; Franksiska, 2006; Halberstadt, 1986; Pânişoară, Sandu, Pânişoară, & Datu, 2015). One assumption underlying the study is that the style of communication salient in a particular setting is determined to some extent by contextual factors, i.e., it depends on the recipient of the communication and its contents.

2. BACKGROUND

The study is based on two theoretical approaches. One is the theory of meaning which served as a basis for defining the communication style, and the other is the cognitive orientation theory which was applied for defining the motivation for communication.

2.1. Communication styles: The meaning system approach

The communication styles were conceptualized and assessed in terms of the meaning system (Kreitler, 2014a, 2021a; Kreitler & Kreitler, 1990). This system contains variables which enable characterizing communications of any kind by describing their specific features of contents, structure, and forms of expression. The characterization is based on the assumption that communication is a form of expressing meanings. The communication is first divided into units each of which includes a referent (i.e., the input or subject to which meaning is assigned) and the meaning assigned to the referent. For example, the sentence "New York is a city on the Atlantic", includes the following two meaning units: New York is a city, and New York is on the Atlantic. In both units, New York is the referent. In the first unit, the assigned meaning defines the general category to which New York belongs (i.e., it is a city), and the second unit describes the location of this city.

A full description of the communication in terms of meaning variables includes characterizing it by variables of the following kinds: (a) *Meaning Dimensions*, which characterize the contents from the viewpoint of the specific information communicated about the referent, such as the referent's Sensory Qualities (e.g., Sky – blue), Feelings and Emotions it experiences (e.g., Mother –loves her child) or evokes (e.g., Darkness– fear), Range of Inclusion (e.g., Body - the head, arms, and torso); (b) *Types of Relation*, which characterize the immediacy of the relation between the referent and the contents, for example, attributive (e.g., Winter - cool), comparative (e.g., Spring - warmer than winter), exemplifying instance (e.g., Country - the U.S.); (c) *Forms of Relation*, which characterize the formal regulation of the relation between the referent and the cognitive contents, in terms of its validity (positive or negative; e.g., Yoga - is not a religion), quantification (absolute, partial; Apple - sometimes

red), and status (factual, desired or desirable; Law - should be obeyed, Happiness - I wish I had more); (d) *Referent Shifts*, which characterize the shifts in the referents in the course of the communication, which may be minimal, medium or large (e.g., A shift from New York to another city such as Boston, to the U.S. or to urban life in general). (e) *Forms of Expression*, which characterize the forms of expression of the meaning units (e.g., verbal, denotation, graphic) and its directness (e.g., actual gesture or verbal description of gesture) (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1990; (f) *Meta-Meaning* variables, which characterize the attitude toward the meaning communication that has been assumed by the respondent or is indicated for the recipients (e.g., it is incomplete, it is a quotation, it is a metaphor).

Previous studies showed that the major kind of variables that distinguish between the expressive and the sharing kinds of communication styles are the variables of Types of Relation. These variables characterize two modes of communication: the objective interpersonally-shared kinds of communications and the personal-subjective communications. The former includes expressions in the form of propositions describing qualities or actions, and comparisons including descriptions of similarities, differences, relationalities and complementary relations. In contrast, personal-subjective types of relation include exemplifying-illustrative description of examples, situations or scenes, as well as interpretational, metaphoric (conventional or innovative) and symbolic relations.

These differences are based on studies in which subjects were requested to communicate interpersonal or personal communications (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1990). Studies showed that individuals whose communications, in general, were based primarily on the interpersonally-shared types of relation focused on objective descriptions or factual data and avoided expressions of personal attitudes, emotions, and evaluations. In contrast, those whose communications in general were based primarily on the personal-subjective types of relation tended to express more their personal views and attitudes, including emotions, experiences, and thoughts.

2.2. Kinds of motivations for communication: The cognitive orientation approach

Style is however a characteristic of the communication itself. The determinants of style reside in the communicator and in the addressee. In regard to the communicator, we focused on his or her motivation to communicate in the shared or withdrawal kind of style. The communicator's motivation was conceptualized and assessed in the framework of the cognitive orientation (CO) theory (Kreitler, 2004, 2014b; Kreitler & Kreitler, 1982), which assumes that motivation is a function of beliefs that may not be completely conscious and may form a motivation which differs differ from one's conscious intention. According to the CO approach, behavior is a function of a motivational disposition which is implemented by a behavioral program. The motivational disposition is a vector defined by the following four belief types: about oneself (i.e., one's habits, feelings), general beliefs about others and reality, beliefs about rules and norms (i.e., how things should be), and beliefs about goals and wishes (i.e., how one would like things to be). The four belief types do not refer directly to the behavior in question but to

its underlying meanings (called themes) which are identified by a systematic standard stepwise interviewing process carried out with pretest subjects. A previous study supported the validity of the described procedure for predicting expressive communicability in schizophrenics and healthy individuals (Kreitler, Schwartz, & Kreitler, 1987). In the present study.

2.3. The Gender of the communicator and of the addressee

A large body of research demonstrated the difference between men and women in communication styles. Salient differences have been detected for example in the content emphases which in men tend to refer to status implications and differences between themselves and others while in women they focus rather on interpersonal connotations based on interdependence (mutual dependence), similarities, and cooperation. Further, women tend to express more their personal point of view, show their attention in listening and use in communication more nonverbal means (Disch, 2009; Mortenson, 2002; Steckler, & Rosenthal, 1985; Tenenbaum, Ford, & Alkhedairy, 2011; Von Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden, & Shochet, 2011; Wood, 2001). It was assumed that the communication style may be affected not only by the communicator's gender but also by the gender of the addressee (Almushayqih, 2020; Carli, 1999; Gray, 1992; Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001; Tanner, 1990). Hence, In the present study both the gender of the communicator and of the addressee were considered.

3. OBJECTIVES

The present study examines the role of the following three factors in the context of communication: the gender of the communicator: man or woman; the gender of the addressee: man or woman; the motivation of the communicator: sharing or withholding. Each of the three variables is represented by two values. The dependent variable is the communication style, i.e., the degree to which it is shaped along the lines of the interpersonally-shared mode of meaning or the personal-subjective mode of meaning. The hypothesis was that the communication style is a function of all three factors – i.e., the gender of the communicator, the gender of the addressee, and the communicator's motivation. The communication style was expected to be more interpersonally-shaped when the communicator is a man, the motivation is withholding and the addressee is a man. It was expected to be more personally- subjectively shaped when the communicator is a woman, the motivation is sharing and the addressee is a woman.

4. METHOD

The study was an experimental one with three variables as predictors (the gender of the communicator, the gender of the addressee, and the communicator's motivation) and one variable as a dependent (the communication style).

4.1. Participants

The subjects were 70 undergraduates in the behavioral sciences, including an equal number of men and women. They were in the age range of 21 to 25.

4.2. Design

The design of the study was a three-factor design. One factor was the CO motivation of the communicator: sharing information versus withholding information, whereas the second and third factors were the gender of the communicator and of the addressee: male versus female.

4.3. The experimental task

The communication referred to the description of a weekend excursion by a family of four in the course of which the 4-year-old child fell and was badly hurt. The experimental task was to communicate the story to a hypothetical male or female.

4.4. Tools

The motivation was assessed in terms of the CO approach (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1982) which assumes that motivation is a function of beliefs which may orient towards sharing and self-disclosure or towards withdrawal and distancing oneself from others. The CO-based motivation was assessed by means of a CO questionnaire which included 40 statements: 10 for beliefs about self, 10 for general belief, 10 for norm beliefs, and 10 for goal beliefs. Responses were to be given by checking one of four presented alternatives, ranging from Very true to Not true at all, scored as 4 to 1. In each belief type half of the items are oriented towards withholding and half towards sharing. The subject got for each belief type only one score that represented the summed directions of the two kinds. The contents of the beliefs represented themes supporting sharing (e.g., expressing one's feelings has a relaxing effect, disclosing one's attitudes is important for making friends, sharing information may help for getting the support of others) or withholding information (e.g., trusting others may be dangerous, it is never helpful to let others

know your real thoughts, sharing information may cause others to exploit your weakness). Each subject got four scores: one for beliefs about self, one for general beliefs, one for norm beliefs, and one for goal beliefs. The reliabilities of each of the four scores in terms of alpha Cronbach ranged from .79 to .85. (Kreitler, 2021b, chapter 5).

The style of communication was assessed in terms of the Kreitler meaning system which enables characterizing the degree to which the communication is based on types of relation characterizing one's use of the objective interpersonally-shared mode of communication or the personal-subjective one. The style of communication consisted in scoring the narrative referring to the experimental task (see 4.3).

The following six types of relation define the objective interpersonally-shared mode of communicating: attribute-describing qualities (e.g., he is a nice person), attributive describing actions (e.g., she helps others), comparative-similarity (e.g., love is like happiness), comparative-difference (e.g., helping differs from punishing), comparative-relational (e.g., a scratch is less than a wound), comparative-complementary (e.g., crying weakens through being comforted). The following six types of relation define the subjective personal mode of communicating: exemplifying instance (e.g., the boy is for example a four-year-old), exemplifying situation (e.g., pain – a person bent over with pain), exemplifying-scene (e.g., when you fall everyone comes to you to help you get up and the ask you how they can help), metaphoric-interpretation (e.g., pain is the unavoidable lesson of life), metaphor- conventional (e.g., to be happy is like being in the seventh heaven), metaphor–original (e.g., joy is like swimming in sweet light), metaphor-symbolic (e.g., love is like a beautiful flower with golden petals covering painful thorns). Each narrative of the task got first two scores: one for the number of types of the relation of the objective style and one for the number of types of the relation of the subjective style. Each response of one of the variables in each of the two modes got one point.

Since in the beginning, most subjects used a mixture of both kinds of styles, reflected in similar scores for the two modes of meaning (i.e., less than half than 1 SD), in the preliminary stage of the analysis of results an additional dependent variable of the study was defined as the time (in seconds) it took the subject to settle on the style which consisted in at least 75% of one style (i.e., either objective or subjective). (For the inter-rater reliability see Procedure).

4.5. Procedure

After signing the consent form, each subject related the story only once – to a female or a male. The determination of the addressee was random. There was no time limit for relating the story. The recorded stories were analyzed by two independent judges in terms of the style of communicating. In cases in which differences in ratings between any two judges exceeded two points, a discussion between the raters was used for deciding on a concordant rating. Thus, the degree of correspondence between the two ratings for all recorded stories was high (see Tools). The mean correlation between two independent raters was .70.

5. RESULTS

The data was in regard to the time it took to get to the dominant communication style was analyzed by the Cox proportional-hazards model which is a regression model enabling studying the association between several predictor variables and the time it takes for a phenomenon to occur. In the present study, the predictor variables were the scores in the four types of beliefs representing the communicator's motivation and the gender of the communicator and of the addressee. In this analysis, the dependent variable was the time it took for the subject in the study to get to the point of 75% of types of the relation of one of the styles of communicating. It was expected that the subject whose CO scores indicate the motivation for sharing would settle sooner on the style of sharing, while the subject whose CO scores indicate the motivation for withholding would settle sooner on the style of withholding. The manifestation of the styles was expected to be affected also by the gender of the communicator and of the addressee.

Table 1.
Results of Cox proportional hazards model with motivation for communication and gender of the communicator and of the addressee as predictors and speed of settling on one's style of communication as a dependent variable.

Predictors	B	SE	Wald	P
Motivation: norms	-.974	.397	6.142	.013
Motivation: beliefs about self	-2.199	.414	31.311	.000
Motivation: goals	-.096	.224	.147	.681
Motivation: general beliefs	-.918	.398	5.321	.021
Gender of addressee	.522	.219	5.608	.030
Gender of communicator	-.472	.188	.152	.591

$\chi^2 (1, 4) = 8.664, p = .018.$

The findings in Table 1 show that the following three predictors that constitute the motivation for communication had significant contributions: beliefs about norms, beliefs about self, and general beliefs. The highest contribution was by beliefs about self. The contribution of beliefs about goals was not significant. The effect of the gender of the addressee was significant, but the effect of the gender of the communicator was not significant. The whole model was found to be significant.

Table 2 presents the results concerning the communication style with the following predictors: the communicator's motivation, and the gender of the communicator and of the addressee.

Table 2.

Results of a regression analysis with motivation for communication and the gender of the communicator and of the addressee as predictors and score on one's communication style as a dependent variable.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Standard Error	Beta	t	P
Constant	2.252	.337		6.674	.000
Motivation: Beliefs about self	.767	.095	.357	8.094	.000
Motivation: General beliefs	-.394	.113	-.199	-3.482	.001
Motivation: Norm beliefs	-.189	.129	-.087	-1.463	.144
Motivation: Goal beliefs	.263	.125	.107	2.108	.036
Communicator: gender	.267	.064	.201	3.171	.002
Addressee: Gender	-.024	.065	-.020	-0.351	.526
Communicator: Gender X norms	.246	.077	.192	3.308	.001

$F_{(5, 65)} = 26.594$, $p < .001$, $R = .459$, $R^2 = .210$

The results in Table 2 show that the following three kinds of beliefs had significant contributions: beliefs about self, general beliefs, and goal beliefs. The most significant contribution was made by beliefs about self. The contribution of beliefs about norms was not significant. Additionally, the contribution of the communicator's gender was significant, but not that of the addressee. However, there was one significant interaction between the communicator's gender and norms. The interaction indicates that when the communicator was male the norm beliefs of the CO motivation contributed significantly to predicting the communication style. The results supported the hypothesis that the communication style depends on the communicator's motivation and the gender of the communicator. The whole model was significant and accounted for 21% of the variance.

6. DISCUSSION

The results showed that the speed with which the communication style became dominant and clearly manifest was predicted by the belief types of the CO motivation for communication and the addressee's gender. The three belief types which predicted the speed of manifesting the communication style were beliefs about self, general beliefs, and norms. Additionally, also the gender of the addressee had a significant contribution to the prediction.

However, when the dependent variable was the dominant communication style the predicting belief types were beliefs about self, general beliefs, and goal beliefs. Additionally, the prediction was supported also by the gender of the addressee and by the interaction between the communicator's gender and norm beliefs. The results indicated that the most potent predictor of the communication style was the communicator's motivation, further modulated by the communicator's gender which brought into play also the norm beliefs. Thus, when the CO of motivation supported withholding and the addressee was a man the communication style was mainly of the objective kind, and when the CO of motivation supported sharing and the addressee was a woman, the communication style was mainly of the subjective kind.

Other cases were matched by communication styles of mixed kinds, manifesting the different possibilities of cooperation between the different factors.

The fact that only three belief types had significant contributions to predicting the duration preceding the manifestation of the communication style and of the communication style itself does not disconfirm the major tenet of the CO theory, according to which the support of only three belief types suffices for shaping a course of behavior (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1982). Thus, the findings support the hypothesis about the role of CO predictors in regard to communication style.

The fact that in both predictions beliefs about self had the largest contribution may suggest the importance of this belief type which reflects the self-image in determining and guiding the formation of the motivational disposition, at least in the two cases examined in the present study. Notably, goal beliefs played in this context a relatively small role as attested by the fact that it had no significant contribution in regard to predicting the time duration of until the dominant communication style appeared and had the relatively lowest contribution to predicting the kind of communication style. The reason may be that the communication style assessed in an experimental situation concerns primarily the present situation rather than goals for any future ones.

Norm beliefs had an intriguing role in this context. In regard to predicting the duration until the appearance of the dominant communication style norm beliefs had a definite and significant role. However, in regard to predicting the kind of communication style, the role of norm beliefs appeared only in interaction with the gender of the addressee. Hence the implication is that the role of norm beliefs was modulated by considering the gender of the addressee. Hence, it was shaped in line with the presented situation.

Concerning the effect of the gender of the interacting agents, the results show that it is a function of the context. Thus, when the predicted variable is the duration until the communication style appears clearly, then it is the gender of the addressee that has a significant effect. It is as if the communicator dwells on the nature of the addressee weighing the likely response of the addressee to the manifestation of the communication style. But when the issue is selecting the communication style, then it is the gender of the communicator that dictates the step to be undertaken, in view of norm beliefs. It is as if the communicator considers what is appropriate or expected of himself or herself in view of one's gender.

7. CONCLUSIONS

A major conclusion of the study is that the communication style is affected by the communicator's motivation. The findings show that applying objective and subjective communication styles is a function of one's beliefs about issues that do not refer directly to communication in general or degree of disclosure or withdrawal of information but only to

the meanings underlying communication, disclosure, and sharing. The communicator is not aware of the connection between one's beliefs and one's communication style and there is no reason to assume that he or she try to adapt their communication style to their beliefs. The impact of the beliefs on the communication style is neither conscious nor under the communicators' voluntary control.

The findings also indicate that in each case at least three of the belief types have significant contributions, although the specific amount of their involvement in the prediction is a function of the context.

Another conclusion of the findings is that each communicator disposes of the two studied communication styles. The activation of one or another is determined among other factors by one's CO motivation supporting one or another of the communication styles. Hence, if one desired to affect the activation of these communications styles the recommended way is by enriching or enhancing the meanings underlying these styles. This procedure is likely to be much more effective than training one or another of the communication styles. The conclusions of the study provide support to the objectives by demonstrating that all three factors significantly impact the style of communication.

It may be assumed that the same conclusions apply also to other communication styles in which one may be interested. The recommended procedure of affecting them is the indirect way of dealing with their underlying meanings which is likely to be more effective in regard to most behaviors than reinforcing directly the behaviors themselves. The reason is that the behaviors are actually grounded in the underlying meanings so that changing the meanings is easier than manipulating the behaviors and is likely to be for a longer duration.

Additional conclusions refer to the role of the gender of the interacting individuals. The results indicate that the impact of the gender of the communicator or of the addressee depends on the predicted variable. When the predicted variable is duration until the manifestation of the communication style then it is the gender of the addressee that has a significant contribution but when the variable is the communication style itself then the communicator's gender is of large importance.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The reported study opens new vistas of studying communication styles in context. The major future directions indicated by the findings concern the communication styles and the themes used for testing them. The first step should be taken in regard to extending the range and kind of narrated themes. Further, it is of importance to extend the examination and characterization of the communication styles to the contents, as manifested for example in terms of the other aspects of the meaning system, namely, meaning dimensions, forms of relation, referent shifts, and forms of expression. Further, in regard to the gender of the communicator and addressee, it is advisable to study the effects of their matching so that a man communicating to a woman should be compared to the narrative of a woman narrating to a man. A most important extension that is recommended is to examine the impact of other communication styles in addition to those examined, for example, the passive, the manipulative, the aggressive, and the assertive communication styles.

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