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Fourfold Communication and the Enneagram

To Communicate Can Be a Deep and Complex Process

The word communicate is used in two different meanings in everyday language. One is just to say/write/express something or to act. But the other is referring to the original meaning of the Latin word *communicare*, which means “to share”.

From that I conclude that in a deeper sense to communicate is a process by which we (1) create a common sense about the situation at hand, (2) decide which our most important questions and concerns are, (3) search for – sometimes new and creative – solutions that hold for everybody involved and (4) agree on how to act.

The Definition of Fourfold Communication is Pragmatic

The Swedish word for Fourfold Communication is *hållbar kommunikation*, which means “Sustainable communication” or communication that will hold for the future.¹ The definition is that *our communication is fourfold when what we say to each other and decide to do is so well investigated and deeply reflected that it holds to build on for the future.*

This means firstly that as long as things work out well for us, we don’t need to practice Fourfold Communication. We only want to use Fourfold Communication when we have some kind of problem, conflict or want to develop ourselves or the group/organization.

Secondly, it is not easy to find solutions that hold to complex organizational problems. These solutions have to meet a number of criteria, among which are: (1) Well enough investigated, all relevant information was supported before the decision. (2) The conclusions are logic and reasonable. (3) We comply with rules and regulations. (4) What we propose is in accordance with our specific goals, values and ethics. (5) It is good or at least acceptable for everybody concerned. And (6) what we want to do is efficient and practicable.

To meet all these criteria is often tough, but the consequence of not doing so is many times that we don’t get rid of the problems that we want to address; we are stuck in one way or another.

The Skills of Fourfold Communication

Fourfold Communication is realized when we practice four different skills in a precise order, which creates a spiral for development. To stress that we are talking about skills that we have to train in order to succeed, we use the word “deep”:

¹ I cannot use the term “Sustainable Communication” in English, since that is already taken by other concepts.



1. Deep Listening to Others: To listen because we want to understand what the other person feels and means. In order to do that we must put our personal values aside and use our imagination and empathy. This is quite easy when we agree with the other person, but most useful when we are in conflict. We Deep Listen to Others because we want to get a clear picture and avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretation.²

- ***Be silence.*** Free yourself from outer and inner noise.
- ***Give attention.*** Be present and focus on what the other is saying.
- ***Use your empathy.*** Imagine that you are the person speaking.
- ***Don't judge.*** Only try to understand what the other is conveying.
- ***Nurture eventual differences.*** It is good that we are not alike.
- ***Forget yourself.*** Welcome the other person and his/her view.



2. Deep Questioning: To ask yourself how it all comes together when what you have heard or seen does not fit with what you already know, or you don't agree. Take as a point of departure that everybody – including yourself – can be wrong and that somebody – or all of us – may have to “re-decide”.

Deep Questions...

- ***...emerge*** when we don't comprehend, often as a result of new information.
- ***...come from inside***, they are important for our own development.
- ***...challenge our assumptions***, they help our critical thinking.
- ***...take time and effort***, before we have good answers.
- ***...help us to reorient***, lead to new perspectives and deep learning.



3. Deep Listening to Oneself: To set your preconceived notions aside and listen to your inner guidance for smarter, new and creative solutions to problems and conflicts, answers that will be good for everybody involved. Look for concrete solutions that resonate with your deeper convictions and will withstand the critical review of other people.

- ***Relax and be silence.*** Empty yourself.
- ***Focus on your Deep Question(s)*** and listen to your inner.
- ***Invite your inner to express itself***, but don't force anything.
- ***Welcome a free flow of messages***, be curious. What does your body and emotions say?
- ***Register whatever comes to you***, images, words, smells, sounds,

² This skill not only includes what we hear with our ears or what other persons say. It is about gathering all kinds of information from the outer world and with all our senses.

feelings... Try to make sense of what you experience, listen for more.



4. Deep Talking: To have the courage to be honest and sincere, both in situations where you are sure and can present good reasons – and to say that you don't know or have doubts, if that is the case. Not being too polite in situations where your honest opinion is needed for the group to develop. When we Deep Talk our body language is unambiguous – brain, heart and gut agree.

- ***Be honest;*** share your inner truth and/or your doubts.
- ***Feel what you need to say*** and take yourself seriously.
- ***Be open and have self-reliance,*** stand up for your perspectives and what you know, also when that differs from the rest of the group.
- ***Decide what you want to say,*** you are in control and you have the initiative.



The Sequence: When we deal with difficulties and practice the four skills above well enough and in the order outlined (clockwise), we develop. If we ignore one or more of the skills – or mix up the order – we get poor communication, instead of Fourfold Communication.

Why All Four Competencies are Important

The consequences of not doing any of the four skills when we have problems are obvious:

- Not Deep Listening to Others well enough, means that we lose contact with outer reality, we are not updated.
- Not Deep Questioning well enough, means that ongoing problems are likely to continue or even get worse...
- Not Deep Listening to Oneself well enough, means that I don't have any good ideas when I/we are in trouble.
- Not Deep Talking well enough, means that I cannot contribute constructively to my own development or to the group.

Enneagram Personality and the Four Skills

I often ask my clients to reflect upon which of the four skills they do most easily and which of the four skills they do most poorly or even avoid. When the group is diverse I get all kinds of replies.

Personally, I am also convinced that every enneatype has a home-base. We rely on one of the four skills more than the others, and we often underdo one or more of the skills that precede our favorite in the developing spiral. I would like to invite you who take part of this material to reflect upon this – and to share your hypothesis about the nine personalities and Fourfold Communication with me.

Fourfold Communication to Overcome the Low Sides of Personality

Fourfold Communication is a concrete and efficient tool for moving upwards in the levels of behavior/functioning/development and it can be used both individually and with groups.³

Individuals benefit from Fourfold Communication because they learn to do the skills that they have omitted or done poorly – and thus arrive at more constructive ideas and solutions to their personal challenges. And groups that practice Fourfold Communication learn to become smarter and to make the best out of all the personalities that participate.

Why Fourfold Communication Makes a Difference

Much of the advice of how to develop with the Enneagram is focused on finding your personality and learning about its strengths and weaknesses and trying to do more of the constructive and less of the destructive. That is good, but often not enough.

When we work with Fourfold Communication we always work with a specific question/issue/context – the concrete situation at hand that we want to handle in a better way. This means that we have two realities that we want to integrate to a consistent whole: our inner world/personality, made conscious with the help of Deep Listening to Ourselves – and the outer world, including the contributions from other personalities, made evident by Deep Listening to Others.

The Difference between Round One and Round Two in a Group Process

When we use Fourfold Communication to help a group evolve we start with a Deep Question. Then everybody is asked to be silent and Deep Listen to Themselves in order to say their reflected opinion about the issue. These replies may be strongly colored by personality and what we need to create here is a space where everybody feels free to be true to themselves.

The next step is to invite everybody to Deep Listen to what everyone else has said about the concern we are investigating. We also invite any questions for clarification. When everybody has made their point we now have a joint picture that is not consistent. There are conflicts and unresolved problems. Typically, to anyone participant the statements made can be divided into three groups: (1) The ones that I have contributed to myself and hold most dearly. (2) Statements

³ I lead diverse groups with up to about 20 people to investigate their concerns and come up with new and creative solutions that are constructive and compelling. If the group is larger we do parallel workshops, and I have found that the communication process is so robust and resilient that they are likely to come up with similar conclusions.

that others have made and that are compatible with my own views. (3) Statements that I don't understand, don't agree with or even hold as irrelevant or untrue.

The challenge here is to encourage all the participants to include also the third category when we go for the Second Round. Everybody is asked what we can learn from the whole picture – when they Deep Question and Deep Listen to Themselves – and when they are open to changing their minds and re-decide what they felt sure about before.

Here people are likely to transcend their habitual personality patterns and become more constructive; they often express their best and high side of personality and sometimes learn things that have a great impact on both themselves and the group. And most important of all – the group is likely to resolve their differences and agree on how to understand their concerns and what steps they need to take.

The Riso and Hudson Development Scale from a Communicative Perspective

Riso and Hudson have defined nine Levels of Development, divided into three groups: Healthy: 1. The Level of Liberation. 2. The Level of Psychological Capacity. 3. The Level of Social Value. Average: 4. The Level of Imbalance. 5. The Level of Interpersonal Control. 6. The Level of Overcompensation. Unhealthy: 7. The Level of Violation. 8. The Level of Delusional Thinking and Compulsive Behavior. 9. The Level of Pathological Destructiveness.

According to Riso and Hudson we have an essence, that is there from birth, and that we have to rediscover. I don't think so. I rather think that we have to learn to practice Fourfold Communication in order to develop ourselves – and as we deal with the specific and concrete challenges that life provides. During that process we get to know ourselves better and learn to develop specific core qualities. But we also need to learn about the other eight types and how we can interact with them in the most constructive ways, depending on their point of departure.

Since communication skills are fundamental to all human interaction, I think that rather than talking about Levels of development, we can point to different Levels of Functionality, depending on how well we communicate in the deeper sense. This is also related to our capacity for giving and receiving constructive feedback, which is a very central competence in most leadership models.

Instead of calling the upper three levels “Healthy”, I would like to call them Constructive, referring more to the outcome of the process:

- 1. The Level of Fourfold Communication as an Integrated Leadership Skill.** Here we can lead others to a Fourfold Communication and help the group to deal successfully with severe concerns and conflicts.
- 2. The Level of Fourfold Communication for My Own Personal Development.** Here we can lead ourselves to practice Fourfold Communication, so that we can learn and develop from the difficulties we meet.
- 3. The Level of Fourfold Communication for Constructive Contributions to the Group.** On this level we are led by somebody to do the four skills well enough and we

are able to arrive at new and creative conclusions that include personal learning and growth. We also have the guts to re-decide and thus gain in self-respect, when that is appropriate.

Instead of “Average” I prefer to call the levels 4-6 Conflictive:

- 4. The Level of Type-Specific Experiences and Behaviors.** On this Level we are so stuck with our own personality, that we cannot truly Deep Listen to and fully respect other personalities. Typically we have problems with, don't ask for or actively avoid feedback, much as a consequence of the fact that we don't have the communicative skills to handle feedback of varying quality constructively.
- 5. The Level of Conflict.** If conflicts often begin at Level Four, they become evident at Level Five. Here each type is manipulating others to have their view, will and desires met. Depending on how the leaders and the group act, the situation can go both ways. If increased awareness and better communication are applied the result can be for the better. Or increased anxiety and impulsive behaviors make the situation worse.
- 6. The Level of Open Aggressiveness.** On this level we are so imbalanced and our anxiety is so strong that people cannot be lead to practice Fourfold Communication, not even when they say that they are willing to try. What we need to do first are a number of things: (1) Calm down, often for days. (2) Agree on rules for how we are going to communicate the next time we meet. (3) We need a trusted and skilled person to lead the communication process. And (4) we need to reflect personally – Deep Question and Deep Listen to Ourselves – upon the situation and what we want to say when we meet.

Below Level Six we have three levels that I want to call Destructive, instead of “Unhealthy”, which is Riso and Hudson's term. In order to handle people and behaviors that stem from these levels, Fourfold Communication is not enough and not a choice for the destructive party. Instead we need to establish very clear limits with the help of the lower half of the Communication Thermometer, which is a meta-model, including Fourfold Communication (see next page).

How to Use the Communication Thermometer

The Communication Thermometer helps us to distinguish 15 different levels of trust and their connected behaviors. One way to use it is to map where different people think that the group is operating for the moment. Another important use is to investigate the situation at hand with the help of Fourfold Communication, and then decide to which level you want to lead, how and why. An important insight is that in order to be good leaders – for ourselves and for other people – we need to be familiar with the constructive behaviors of all the fifteen levels and to know when a certain level is the most appropriate. Another way to put it, is to say that we need the lower half of the Communication Thermometer to defend ourselves against destructive behaviors and to ensure a safe space, where we can open ourselves to our vulnerabilities, so that we can learn.

The Communication Thermometer

Commu- nication	Level	Name	Attitude
Good ↑	+7	Mutual agreement	I create Fourfold Communication
	+6	Fourfold Communication	I listen and I'm eager to learn
	+5	Willing to compromise	I'm open to negotiations
	+4	Worth a struggle	I have a good point
	+3	Ordinary conversation	I'd like to know where we stand
	+2	First meeting	I'd like to know if you are friendly
	↓ Poorly functioning	+1	Idealizing
0		No communication	I am independent
-1		Distrust	I have a negative attitude to you
-2		Deprecation	I make my demands
-3		Group pressure	I want to turn others against you
-4		Explicit threats	I want to force you
-5		Sanctions	I put pressure on you
-6	Punishment	I invite you to self-examination	
-7	Total control	I take charge of you or the situation	

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This is an English draft version of the Communication Thermometer, which shows the different atmospheres and levels of trust that we create. If you feel that you understand the general idea, I would appreciate your help to find more accurate English names and descriptions for some of the levels.

This article about communication is written by Eva Grundelius who is a Swedish biologist, author and communication consultant. Eva has created The Communication Thermometer and the theory of Fourfold Communication. For further information see her latest book "Helt överens! Handbok i hållbar kommunikation" and her webpage: www.hallbarkommunikation.se.