

Narratives of Experience and Non-Violent Communication as a PR Strategy

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Abstract

This article is a theoretical reflection on Public Relations and the so-called narrative paradigm of communication. The idea is to emphasize the need new narratives that agree with the new contexts, working with non-violent communication and affective narratives of communication, especially regarding internal communication.

Keywords: organizational communication; public relations; narratives of experience; new narratives; non-violent communication; affective communication; micro narratives.

This article seeks to discuss the possible impact on business of successful Public Relations strategies which work with individualities, based on transparency, affection, respect and trust, and understanding the diversity of voices that make up the world as a starting point. This way, PR practitioners can become active agents of transformation for a more inclusive and humanized society, through new narratives, since a society with more equity and justice, in a sustainable world, depends precisely on the capacity to replace the technical and protocol communication for a more interpersonal, people-centered and human-based communication.

Organizations need to consolidate their commitments to the people with whom they interact. For Lipovetsky (2003), mainly because of the new media and the amount of information that is nowadays available, accessible and shared, there is a greater awareness of the subjects about their performance in the world, their power to make the difference and to demand more from organizations in issues such as: environment preservation, quality of life, the listening to the manifestations of their ideas and personalities, and explanations about the contradiction between discourse and some morally unacceptable practices such as corruption, intolerance and disrespect for diversity.

Facing this context, PR practitioners need to think their communication under the new narrative point of view, that is, not only those technical and informative communication, but also a communication based on trust, solidarity, security, on antiracism and humanism, without prejudice. It means treating these questions not exclusively in a rational way of thinking, but also in a more symbolic layer, aiming to produce meaning and affectivity, valuing the potentialities in each one.

Context

For Han (2015, p.88), the huge manifestation of diseases in a great part of society (depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, personality disorder, anxiety and stress, for example) are marks of a positivist society, in which the people feel failed before the uncontrollable, confused, ever-changing and excessive context. Individuals of the twenty-first century demand too much from themselves and self-exploit their capabilities for quick deliveries.

For Sennett (2010), this context makes people to have new working relationships, in which there is no long-term logic. They are (self)pressured to delivery positive results all the time, in several projects. Often, this flattening of time and focus leads to the weakening of social bonds and affections, causing the corrosion of loyalties and mutual commitments.

In addition to this pressure, the excesses of the information triggers difficulties in managing priorities and in which of that information we should focus on. This is what the concept of “attention economy”, coined by Thomas H. Davenport and JC Beck (2001), in the book of the same name, suggests to designate the management of attention – seen as a limited good of increasing importance, due to the growing number of content generated by the varied media, especially the digital one.

The difficulty in keeping the focus on a single task, given the range of information that is available to us, is exactly what Holmes (1997) calls “attention deficit syndrome”, characterized by the individual’s inability to “focus their attention during any reasonable length of time” (HOLMES, 1997, p.331).

However, the fact that we absorb so many different characteristics all the time, as a proof of our adaptability to the environment and of the good performance before the many social roles we submit ourselves, leads us to see only our own selves. The lack of links with the other weakens our capacity for gratitude. For both Han (2015) and Sennett (2010), the gratification crisis is connected to a narcissistic disturbance and to the lack of a relations with the other, which

brings pain and suffering to oneself.

The narcissist is not concerned about the experiences, he wants to live everything in which he finds himself. In experience we meet the other. These meetings are transformative, they change us. Just living through something, on the contrary, extend the self and the other in the world. In self-love, the limit related to the other is clearly bypassed. In narcissism, on the contrary, it fuses (HAN, 2015, p.84).

The weakening of experiences (LARROSA-BONDÍA, 2002) is worsen when people understand to do not have time to dedicate themselves to the other, especially time to talk and listen, to communicate, to interact, to experience this other. Individuals only worried about themselves, trapped in the present of their daily lives and in their performance do not experience the art of the encounter.

The experience, the possibility that something happens or touches us, requires a gesture of interruption, a gesture that is almost impossible in these times. It requires stopping to think, stopping to look, stopping to listen. It requires thinking slower, looking slower, and listening slower; stop to feel and feel slowly, linger in the details, suspend the opinion, suspend the judgment, suspend the will, suspend the automatism of the action, cultivate attention and delicacy, open eyes and ears, talk about what happens to us, to learn about slowness, to listen to others, to cultivate the art of meeting, to be silent, to have patience and to give ourselves time and space (LARROSA-BONDÍA, 2002, 24).

Therefore, this context is of impoverishment of the experiences and of the consequent relational weakening. Because of that, we believe it is fundamental for Public Relations professionals to rethink their role as communicators, as well as the need to create new communication narratives that can truly dialogue with the other. More than to dialogue, they should be able to listen to audiences related to an organization in order to understand them and create these new narratives, which has also to be adapted to these new contexts.

New Narratives

PRs must always be aware of the needs and thoughts of organizations, and their opinions in their social, historical, economic, cultural and political context. For each new contextual reality—for new thoughts, contents, individuals and media platforms—new narratives must be developed, appropriate to it.

When thinking about communication, it is clear that its object of study “is dynamic and changeable, because the problems studied are historical phenomena, institutions, power relations, social classes, cultural manifestations” (Lopes, 2001: 37). Therefore, doing and studying communication cannot mean to be stuck in technical and protocol truths, but rather to be open to reflections on symbology, ideas, opinions, senses and meanings, as well as the values that are in the social and individual imaginary, all dependent on the contexts in force.

It is through these new contexts that the agents of the field of Public Relations recreate the narrative realities of the organizations, from new narratives that are related to subjects that were not previously openly discussed, such as: concerns about environmental, social and economic sustainability; the valorisation of diversity and its potential, through the discourse of female empowerment, or the narrative of respect regarding the sexual choice of its public, or with narratives that speak to the new generations - anxious, hyperconnected and with depression and stress, diseases of the 21st century.

These ideas reinforce the organization’s need to create new narratives. It is clear the perception that today narratives that did not have the same senses in other times are being discussed. There were other truths for organizations. Power-centric, rational, objective, and

focused only on goals and profits (at any cost), they lived in reality that is not acceptable by the new thoughts and by the manifestations of individuals in society, who see their power and require new positions from the organizations - in both, their narratives and, especially, in their actions.

The new narratives of the 21st century should not be closed in centralizing discourses of organization, rational, technical and protocol. On the contrary, they must involve the understanding and the co-participation of the other, of their experience, of their emotion and feelings, of respect, of empathy, and of nonviolent communication.

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Humanization

It is necessary to understand the transformations of the world and to observe that communication must be a reason for humanization in this rational and without affection environment, in which there is no time and context for relationships and interactions. It is important to realize that if the PR field and its communications were characterized by uniformity and homogeneity, with equal messages for all the audiences of the organization, today it is necessary to consider the differences and multiplicity (MUMBY, 2010), and value to the relationships among these diversities, and especially to have respect for them.

Humanization is to reflect, feel, narrate, empathize, understand the diversity, respect – all those things that only human beings can do. In the words of Antônio Cândido, humanization is understood as:

The process that confirms in men those traits that we consider essential, such as the exercise of reflection, the acquisition of knowledge, the good will towards the neighbour, the thinning of the emotions, the capacity to penetrate life problems, the sense of beauty, the perception of the complexity of the world and beings, the cultivation of humour (CANDIDO, 1995, 249).

Daniel Pink (2007) speaks precisely about this importance of the use of humour for the humanization of communication. According to Pink (2007, p.181), unleashing the sorrows of the organizations in the era of abundance and new contexts has become not only more common but also more necessary. It represents quality of life, motivation and involvement, as well as contributes to the improvement in a good organizational environment. This is because it is possible to generate feelings of well-being, relief and lightness through humour, sensations that are necessary to deal with pressures, competitions and stress in a context of speeds, ephemeris, rationalities and lucrative goals.

Pink (2007) also speaks about emotions and the sense of beauty for humanization. For him, the “old narratives” would be exactly those linked to the society of excesses and abundances, which he conceptualizes as developed over *high tech* abilities, that is, objective, logical and rational needs. What he believes is that those narratives no longer work with today’s individuals, who need narratives developed on two other emotional and sense-building skills, with empathic ties and understandings. These skills would be the *high concept* and the *high touch*:

The *high concept* is the capacity to create artistic and emotional beauty, the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new. *High touch* is the ability to empathize with others, understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning (PINK, 2007, p.48).

These concepts can be considered the foundation of new narratives. What can also be

associated with a new “way of being together, in which the imaginary, the dreamy, the playful, precisely, occupy a primordial place” (MAFFESOLI, 2010, p.27) and can generate narratives capable of affecting, transform and inspire.

From this point of view, the humanization of organizations (which does not only pass through clandestine routes to official eyes and does not only inhabit fissures, informal or forbidden places) demands an organizational will for the constitution of effective formal places of participation. It has nothing to do with the creation of manuals, rational and technical behaviour, but the real understanding of the need for an environment that enables and/or encourages the manifestation of subjectivities and diversity, the listening (not that which watches and punishes, but that which wants to know and learn) and the realization of self-criticism. In this way, it will be possible to learn/create/innovate, to qualify relationships and links, to constitute legitimacy and to widen the alignment between the organization’s objectives and those of the individuals who are part of it (BALDISSERA, 2009).

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Affectivity

According to Paim (1993), affectivity can be described as the capacity to experience feelings and emotions. This means that implicitly exists in the concept of affectivity, the presence of a relational content: to be affective towards ourselves, to others or to some environmental fact or context. For this experimentation of feelings and emotions to occur, it is necessary to understand the context and narratives of the individuals (micronarratives) that are part of it, both our own, that must be observed with self-criticism, like those of the others, that must be understood with respect and without judgments, seeing all the potentialities of affection that this relationship can generate.

Ey, Bernard and Brisset (1988), describe the affection as the general term used to demonstrate the phenomena of affectivity, including issues of desire, pleasure and pain, present in the experience in the form of vital feelings, besides of humour and emotions. Considering that much of an individual’s experiences are experienced within organizations, it is critical to understand these micronarratives of individuals within organizations, especially how they affect each other.

It is important to notice that, by the end of the day, it is affections that will make the public accepts or rejects the transmitted communication. According to Sodr  (2007), the senses tend to command the sphere of ideas. But at the same time, the author makes it very clear that “more than cognitive and objectively sustainable content (judgments), affections and sensations are those who preside over the discursive games of morality” (SODR , 2007, p.119).

Therefore, when we speak of communication, it only occurs when there is affection. Affecting means to move, provoke a change, to move with the senses and feelings (MARCONDES FILHO, 2008). The affection can bring about a change in the being, which causes one to feel and think differently from before one was affected (Espinosa, 1979). In the same vein, Slywicht (1998) observes that affection is the act of letting itself be touched (and affected) by others and the world, and “when this occurs there is a new visualization of the relation between the being and the world” (SLYWICHT , 1998, p.52). Affection leads the person to have different attitudes and behaviours, leads them to an action, moved by their new feeling.

Thus, we can say that communication happens only when the message can touch, affect and transform the invisible, the interior of the person, his soul, which according to Nietzsche (2003) is a social structure of impulses and affections. When this intensity of affectivities is externalized, it takes the body of the affected person in matter of expression and action. This means that communication occurs only when “affections gain the thickness of the real and take

place” (ROLNIK, 1989, p. 26), when the messages affect the invisible and are externalized in a visible action.

Espinosa (1979), the philosopher of affections, clarifies this understanding by asserting that when a body is affected, that affection can increase or decrease its potency to act by stimulating or restraining it. If the affections produce joy, the power to act is increased. Otherwise, if they are a cause of sadness, it diminishes. Affection, when it in fact occurs, leads one to action, positive or negative.

By these thoughts, Marcondes Filho (2008) defines communication exactly as an “event,” a process that occurs only when it deeply affects a person, generating changes in his mind and heart, leading to action. For the author, communication is not about the transmission of information. Even if there is exchange and sharing, it is more than that, it is a process that can be (re)constructed, fluidly, accordingly to the generated affections and with the reverberations caused within each person.

For these reasons that the thoughts about the attempts of these new narratives of communication in being affective arise. That is: transformative. Being transformative in relation to possible prejudiced attitudes to disrespectful actions towards otherness, even though unconscious biases, present in the culture of the organization and its members.

Through these new narratives, people who still have these thoughts of dehumanization can be affected. Those thoughts in which you find old narratives about what each gesture, every feeling and every dream of the other should be. As if feelings, dreams and future were prepared to be equal to all the people. For the new narratives, made possible by environments in which people can exchange affections, it can create relationships, recognize themselves and self-know themselves, besides getting to know different people.

It is through affective communication that one can also change the thoughts of those who, for some reason, feel overwhelmed with sorrows and fears, anxieties and pressures, in this world of appearances and trends, of controversial ideas and judgments. This can lead to negative actions on their part, such as demotivation, the corrosion of loyalties and lack of commitment, as pointed by Sennett (2010).

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Narratives of Experience

The processes of cognition and affectivity are linked not only to experiential issues, but also to the emotional and the perceptual. More than the lived experiences, people construct senses by the memories that they shape and keep from their relations with the organizational environment, existential conflicts, work conditions, relations of power, professional expectations, vanity, ambition, desire, dreams, frustrations, in short, by its life history in the daily life of the organization and in relation to the other stories in which one is involved in the organization (ROMAN, 2009, 132).

It is on those aspects between experience and memories that Kahneman (2012) addresses the existence of two selves: the *experiencing self* and the *remembering self*. The *experiencing self* has a quiet voice, since “memories are all we have to retain our experience of living, and the only perspective we can take when thinking about our lives is, in effect, the self-remembering” (KAHNEMAN, 2012, p.476). This means that the knowledge, affections and feelings that are learned and apprehended with the past become sources for future memories, not necessarily for future experiences. Therefore, what is most relevant to think is that new narratives are the expression and reception of the “narratives of experience” (NASSAR; COGO, 2011).

The narratives of experience are related to the memories of experiences and to the background that one has, and are also related to the functioning of the *remembering self*: it gets

stories together and retains them for future reference and therefore can also lead to engagement. A story is about significant events and memorable moments, not about the passage of time. It is about producing sense.

Sense has to do with aesthetics, which comes from the Greek “*aisthetikós*” - development of ways to achieve sensitivity and sensibility of the people - with the objective to cause an immediate adhesion, a stimulus. The new narratives need to have this role of provoking in their audiences a pleasurable sense of involvement and enjoyment, to generate an interest, an engagement or an action. “Interest is the self-orientation to every act of mental assimilation” (Piaget, 1969, p. 38), so that when a work seems interesting to us, the fatigue diminishes, and it seems easier and more enjoyable. New narratives, by working with narratives of experience in their communications, can therefore generate that interest and engagement.

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Dignity and Respect

Through the understanding of the narratives of existing experiences in an organization, it is possible to perceive that the individuals involved are different in several aspects. And each one can only be present in what is. For Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), dignity is an inherent quality of human beings, related to everything that is priceless, and therefore irreplaceable for something else, since there is nothing that has the same value. To the men - the only possessors of dignity - an equivalent value cannot be attributed, like you could do with things, which can be exchanged for other things of the same price.

Thus, for the philosopher, dignity is a characteristic that distinguishes human beings, who possess their individual personalities, distinct and irreplaceable and, therefore, dignity cannot be negotiated. The dignity of man is linked to his autonomy, which characterizes him as a person (KANT, 1973).

When we are talking about a new narrative (affective and respectful in communication), we are talking about the one that underlies the dignity, just like the ideas, the practices, the habits and the dreams of the people who are part of an organization (BOFF, 2012). Through this affective narrative, it is able to explain origins, personalities, affections, developments and purposes, whether in the personal or professional life of the individual, of his stories, of his place in the world as a human being, including in the organizational world.

There are within each individual an infinite number of characters who sometimes exhibit themselves, sometimes conceal themselves. Personalities that poli-exist is the real and imaginary. Each has within oneself universes of dreams, but also galaxies of uncertainties and fears. Explosions of happiness and implosions of unhappiness. Insatiate impulses of desires and non-wills. Loaded with absences and silences sometimes, and sometimes full of presences and voices. We are all equal as humans, we feel this constant turmoil of ideas and feelings. But we are unique stories and experiences. we all have our own dignity, distinct and irreplaceable.

Equality consists in that: because we are all human beings, we possess our particularities, our differences and, therefore, equally, everyone should have the right to this freedom to be different, to think and to stand in a different way. The equality that should exist is that of respect. Respect for the human being, his dignity and all his diversity of ideas, opinions, choices and ways of being and being in the world.

When one speaks of affective communication, one speaks of respect. “Respecting involves taking an interest in the other, developing empathy and finding common ground, even, perhaps, winning admiration for those who are different from us” (SALES, 2017, online). The act of respecting is conceived as “treating with reverence or reverence; venerate, honour” (FERREIRA, 1986, p.1495). An affective communication recognizes the individual from his

particularities, his narratives of experience, and finds in this diversity the great wealth and potential that exists within each member of the organization.

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Empathy and Non-Violent Communication

There is no egalitarian value in the self and the you. Each one is unique and has its background, its history. Empathy is not just putting yourself in someone else's shoes. That would be impossible. Empathy is the respect and appreciation for the experience and perspective of the other. "It is the respectful understanding of what others are living" (ROSENBERG, p.133, 2006).

Empathy is to respect and value the another, creating a connection, valuing the story and feeling of the other, emptying the mind of pre-judgments and interpretations and "listening with our whole being" (ROSENBERG, p.134, 2006). When there is a connection, there is humanization. The humanization of organizations is not about manuals, rational and technical behaviour, but about the real understanding of existing needs and affections.

The rational, the intellectual understandings block empathy. With the connection of real listening on unmet needs, it is possible to remain in empathy, allowing the interlocutors to reach deeper levels of themselves.

As mentioned by Andrade (2017), empathy, inherent capacity of the human being, carries with it an evolutionary process, ranging from synchrony, identification, emotional contagion, emotional sensitivity, reaching the identification with the community and the construction of citizenship. The author reminds us that the subject, anatomically speaking, brings correlations with the profession: "Although empathy is not summarized or restricted only to brain regions, there is a correlation between the cortical spaces in which the neurons involved with empathic actions are located and the areas associated with language, imagination and emotions ", thus relating, in a certain sense, to the proposal of the new Public Relations narratives - truly connective.

With the connection of the true listening over unmet needs, it is possible to remain in empathy, allowing the interlocutors to reach deeper levels of themselves. When we speak of narratives related to empathy, we propose new narratives capable of connecting people, allowing them to know each other more deeply and to awaken their transforming critical spirit, beyond restricted organizational interests.

Moreover, empathy is the basis of nonviolent communication, in which theorized steps are taken to understand the other with whom one communicates, with the purpose of generating a connection, understanding their needs. It is to observe without evaluate, without judging. Identify feelings without confusing pure feelings with pseudo-feelings (those we believe others have caused us), to identify there what is felt and needed for a more assertive and effective communication.

New Narratives to Create Engagement and Impact for Business

Studies conducted by the Gallup Institute published in the Brazilian magazine *Você RH* and analysed by Maurício Goldstein and Fábio Betti (2013) revealed that companies with highly engaged employees had an increase of 342% in profit, when compared to other companies that did not have actions related to the engagement. Companies listed among the best place to work by *Você S.A.* and the Great Place to Work show a return on shareholders' equity four percentage points above the average of the 500 largest companies.

When working with respect to diversity, the results are also extremely positive for the business. Research by the Gallup Institute has also identified that companies with gender diversity policies are 15% more likely to exceed the targets.

Another McKinsey study, published and commented in the *Valor Econômico* Magazine

by Adriana Fonseca (2012), carried out 180 publicly traded companies from France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, demonstrating that companies ranked at the top of the Diversity ranking had ROE (return on equity) 53% higher on average and EBIT (earnings before interest and taxes) 14% higher.

A research carried out by a Brazilian agency called *Santo Caos*, specialized in engagement, commented by one of its idealizers Jean Soldatelli (2018) in an interview for the Brazilian *CBN radio*, pointed out that, after interviewing more than 900 people all over Brazil, he identified that disengagement can bring about a loss to Brazilian companies of R\$ 12.8 billion (US\$ 3.6 billion) every year.

These surveys show how the lack of attention and respect with the people who are part of the company can impact - a lot - the business, causing damages and more disengagement.

Conclusions

The new narratives of the organization are, therefore, those that form a communication based on the affection, the understanding of the otherness and the self-criticism about the culture of that organization, made possible by environments of respect, of real listening by the ideas and opinions of its members. This affection is a consequence of the constant valorisation of human dignity, regardless of the individual's way of being and being in the world.

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