



D2.2 COMPENDIUM

Educational resources about communication for sport managers and coaches



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Introduction

The results of the RIGHTS' survey (collection of stories of hate speech, D1.1) have shown that, in the 27.8% of the cases, the haters were coaches or managers. Such data is alarming if we consider that coaches should be not only technical figures, but also educational figures (as clearly stated in the *European Sport Coaching Framework*) and, in the same way, managers have the responsibility to run and represent a sport society.

As for them the communicative dimension plays a fundamental role in the management of the team and development of the single players or of the society, this Compendium aims at being a practical tool to reflect on the way we communicate, in order to be, not only more effective, but also aware and respectful while communicating.

The Compendium comes out from an educational course carried out by the staff of Ca' Foscari at USMA's premises for coaches and managers. It summarizes some of the main issues of the course and provides the analysis of some materials collected during the course.

The focus of RIGHTS is on hate speech (in a broad sense), but of course the reflection on the offensive or discriminatory language must start from the very beginning and include different aspects of communication, first of all "the power of words", especially when they function as "labels".

So let's start by explaining what hate speech is. Hate speech can be defined as any statement that discredits, or discriminates against the other person. Such adverse language can also be encountered off the sports field, in environments like the workplace where one may hear statements (judgments) aimed at discrediting the other, such as "You're stupid" or "You are fat", etc. The above expressions are characterized by a negative and derogatory use of *judgment*; which is a discursive modality and in a broader sense, a communicative modality that expresses the merit or value of a person according to a subjective and arbitrary evaluation. Judgment, as a means of communication, consequently represents a form of conduct or behaviour. In this regard, we remind you that communication (verbal and nonverbal) falls within the range of behaviours that the person can enact. Therefore, judgment appears in the form of both behaviour and communication, present in all aspects of daily life, and so also in the sports field. To start to observe our way of behaving and communicating in different contexts is to start to recognize ourselves as well as our discursive modalities; and to understand if, and how much, we resort to judgment. This practice of self-reflection can lead us to automatically recognize in ourselves and others those extreme discursive formulations (in negative) characterized by Hate Speech. This transition in our thinking is essential to develop an awareness of our way of relating to the world and adapt our communication accordingly. The goal is to understand if we can use other formulations without judgment, and whether these other formulations can communicate ideas effectively without discriminating or offending in the way that hate speech does.

Let us now try to analyze some characteristics of communication useful for a greater understanding of the phenomenon of hate speech.

1 Non-communication is impossible

“Non-communication is impossible. There is no such thing as non-behaviour. Words, silence or activity have the value of a message, they influence others and others in turn respond to this communication” (Watzlawick et al., 1971: 40).

Our actions and our behaviour are communication in all respects: Watzlawick's axiom on the impossibility of non-communication should be interpreted as the impossibility, on the part of each individual, to perform a non-behaviour.

When we speak, our meaning and our actions are evident. We send nonverbal messages even with our gestures or our proxemics, which can convey our meaning as effectively as the verbal messages. And when we are silent? When we are not moving? When we do not respond to chats, messages, emails or anything else? How can we catalog these moments as communication?

In all these cases, we are in fact implementing a form of communication. Let's think of a pupil questioned by the teacher who does not answer the teacher's questions. The non-response is a very strong communication, as is that of an athlete who remains impassive to the instructions given by a coach. These expressions through non-speech or non-action are very powerful forms of communication that have a strong effect on the behaviour of the interlocutor (as in the examples, that of the teacher and the coach).

The first important action to take is to acknowledge that we are immersed in a continuous process of communication. At all times we are transmitting a message with the voice, with the body, with the eyes. Perhaps our receiver will not correctly interpret this message, perhaps it will not be consistent with our meaning, but “something” will inevitably pass between the two interlocutors.

2 The communicative responsibility lies with the sender

The communicative act is a small communicative unit that is part of an exchange produced by a sender towards a receiver and which has a single and precise intention. It can consist of the production of a single word, or of a gesture; more often of a combination of verbal and nonverbal elements.

Is it possible to attribute responsibility for communication to one person or the other?

Does the responsibility lie with the sender, the receiver, both or elsewhere?

The fact is that the communicative act is produced by the person who intends to communicate something, and each of us is responsible for his or her own communication, for what one transmits- and not only with words. As we are continuously in communication, we continually have this responsibility to manage.

With this understanding, it seems obvious to attribute responsibility for the communication to the sender. Let's now look at other examples taken from everyday life.

When we use statements like:

“I sent an email and no one answered me”

“This team is always late”

“That player/teacher/student/coach doesn't understand anything”

All these expressive methods have a common denominator: they are statements that give the responsibility of the communication to the receiver of the same. These are statements in which the responsible person is external to us (e.g.: the respondents of the email, the team, the player/teacher/student/coach).

If we delegate the communicative responsibility to the receiver with statements such as "it is the other who must ..." or "it is he who did not answer me", it is impossible for us (on the communicative level) to intervene, as we place ourselves in a position external to the problem presented. By giving the responsibility to third parties, we effectively remove ourselves from the possibility of acting and changing the situation. So, regardless of the situation, in communication it is always the responsibility of the speaker to construct communication in a way that is participative and accountable, changing the paradigm; and consequently allowing the possibility of change. For example, we could modify the communication from "They did not answer me" to "I did not send an effective email".

Taking responsibility for communication and not delegating it to third parties means reformulating our thoughts (these too are communication) and our sentences from another perspective: Transforming from "they are ..." or "you are ..." to "What can I do to ..." "How can I be effective in ...?". Restructuring problems and critical issues in the first person helps us to find a new perspective from which we can identify a concrete, actionable solution for the problem at hand.

3 Dialogic Model - an operational model of intervention

Here, we will use the Dialogic Model to analyze communication; as such we start with the assumption of "discursive practices as generative of 'configurations of reality'" (Turchi, 2007: 79). We also introduce the definition and concept of 'Discursive Repertoire,' which the author defines as: *"A finite mode of construction of reality, linguistically understood, with a pragmatic value, which groups even more sentences (called "archipelagos of meaning"), articulated in concatenated sentences and diffused with the value of assertion of truth, aimed at generating (constructing) / maintaining a narrative coherence"* (Turchi, 2007: 72).

When we communicate, we construct a message composed of words, phrases or texts.

Discursive repertoires are the exact set of phrases, however long or short, that make up our discourse. Each of us constantly employs discursive repertoires; anytime we talk or even when we think, we use them. They describe the ways in which we construct our narration and our discussions, as well as how we pronounce them; however, they do not describe the very object of that narration¹. While communicating, we all use multiple discursive repertoires to compose our message, assembling and integrating them, even when utilizing the nonverbal or other channels.

In the moment in which we construct communication, we are the "senders" of the message to the receivers. Utilizing the Dialogic Model, we see the sender as responsible for the communicative act, for it is he or she who can manage to communicate in better and more effective ways, the "what" to be expressed and the "how" to express it.

So, in communication, the goal is to induce and facilitate a certain type of change in reality.

In the Dialogic Model, the discursive repertoires are grouped into 3 categories (Turchi, Cellegghin, Sperotto, Poeta, 2012: 4):

1. "Maintenance repertoires" (of the status quo) that block change;
2. "Hybrid repertoires" which vary according to use and context;
3. "Generative repertoires" that facilitate change, i.e., generators of a new reality.

¹ All our communications, everything we say and write is made up of one or more discursive repertoires.

The use of the repertoires is independent of the content. The content, the message you want to convey is there, and it is very important, but it is not enough to generate change. Conversely, the choice of the repertoires to be used in communication is fundamental because:

- each of us uses them, more or less consciously, when constructing our own discourse;
- the specific type of repertoire used has a decisive influence on communication.

Below is a brief classification of the repertoires (taken from Turchi, Cellegghin, Sperotto, Poeta, 2012: 81-84):

1. **Retention repertoires.** They do not produce a shift towards discursive configurations other than those that have already become available. In short, they maintain the status quo within the discursive configuration and do not produce change. Some examples:
Sanctioning reality. It establishes a reality in an absolute, certain, and therefore non-modifiable way. The possibility of transforming the defined reality within scenarios is not considered.
 "You are always distracted", "You are never punctual", "Imprecise, as usual", "The coach is always ...".
Judgment. It connotes an element of discourse expressed through value-type attributes (moral or qualitative) without making explicit the criteria on the basis of which the connotation is constructed.
 "You are not very careful", "He is a strict teacher", "That boy is lazy", "He is talented but he does not work hard".
 - *Opinion.* It configures a reality based exclusively on the perspective of the speaker. The form of use of opinion makes clear that a personal opinion is expressed ('in my opinion'). This form of use contributes to the maintenance of the status quo as its expression confines the discussion within the personal perspective of the speaker.
 "For me, that boy is distracted", "In my opinion he is a strict coach", "I think that ...".
 - *Non-response.* It answers in a non pertinent way to what the question poses.
 "I don't know" or the person simply doesn't answer.
 - *Generalization.* It answers the question in a relevant but inadequate way; merely references what the question brings about by using transversal reasonings to the contexts. The statements are not specific, and do not cover what is required by the question.
 "Lazy players do not perform on the field", "Referees are never unfair".
2. **Hybrid repertoires.** They formalize those rules for the use of language which can take on both a maintenance and a generative value. Let's look at some examples of hybrid repertoires.
 - *Prescription.* It consists of provisions/orders given by a third party. They impose a single scenario to be followed in terms of appropriate conduct.
 "Do this exercise!", "You must ...", "You must not ...", "Be quiet in the locker room!".
 - *Possibility.* It configures reality in terms of uncertainty, to make available elements which may be used in turn to construct a new scenario (it generates a 'fluid' reality).
 "It may be that ...", "You could ...", "Do you think it is possible that ...?".
3. **Generative repertoires.** They allow us to shift towards "other" discursive configurations from those that have already become available. Here are some examples of generative repertoires:
 - *Proposal.* It configures reality in probabilistic, uncertain terms and offers new elements to the configuration that allow you to increase the range of prospective real-life scenarios.

The repertoire of the *Proposal* is configured as an open question, leaving maximum openness to new realities. Examples include sentences in interrogative form, and open questions.

"Could you ...?"

- *Anticipation.* It configures one or more potential future scenarios, starting by taking into consideration the elements which refer to the current scenario.

"Based on what you tell me, it is possible that ... or ... or ... or ... may happen", "If we act like this, 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... might occur".

- *Description.* It represents elements related to a current or past reality; it generates reality from a 'third person' perspective, which is therefore a shared reality among all interlocutors, as it is devoid of elements of judgment.

"The player arrived late today", "The goalkeeper has saved X total shots out of the overall total".

4 Examples

Let us try to apply the Dialogic Model to our way of communicating. We put some prompts to a group mainly composed of football coaches, and asked them to write down their answers to then allow an analysis of the discursive modalities "under the microscope".

The research was not so much interested in analyzing the content of the responses, as the methods (repertoires) used by the coaches in describing certain situations.

The prompt was:

"Describe a critical issue related to your role and/or the situation in which you operate."

The prompt thus posed asks the participant to describe a critical situation. We note that in the prompt there is a precise indication for a certain type of answer; that is, it asks the respondent to describe a situation, requesting that he/she use a descriptive method to communicate facts without personal interference. Therefore the request (implicit as it is not expressed directly) is to remain on a descriptive level only, without the use of judgments, opinions, comments, etc.

Below we faithfully report the transcription of two answers to the prompt that was put to the coaches and managers, which signalled them to describe an issue they currently face which is present and has not yet been resolved (or managed).

EXAMPLE 1

"A child who is definitely the antisport par excellence- both from a physical point of view (he does not manage to be coordinated, he keeps putting on more weight, etc.) and from a technical one, a lover of the sport he practices and therefore would like to continue practising.

At his age, he will absolutely not be able to play with satisfaction moving forward with his team.

How to make it clear that "there is no room for him" to his family and him?"

The answer was then broken down into the different repertoires (minimal portions of the speech with complete meaning) in this way:

1. A child who is **definitely** the antisport par excellence → rep. SANCTIONING REALITY
2. both from a physical point of view → repertoire of the specification (not described here)
3. (He does not manage to **be coordinated**, → REP. JUDGMENT
4. **keeps putting on more weight**, etc.) and from a technical one, → rep. JUDGMENT

5. a lover of the sport he practices → rep. JUDGMENT
6. and that therefore would like to continue practising. → repertoire specification (not described here)
7. At his age, he will absolutely not be able to play with satisfaction moving forward with his team. → rep. SANCTIONING REALITY + JUDGMENT
8. How to make it clear that "there is no room" for him → rep. SANCTIONING REALITY

Analyzing and counting the frequency of the repertoires used we observe that there are:

- 3 maintenance repertoires (sanctioning reality);
- 4 maintenance repertoires (judgment)

for a total of 7 maintenance repertoires out of 9 overall repertoires.

EXAMPLE 2:

"We have a willing coach, always proactive and engaging, but technically poor.

The difficulty is finding her a role, because losing her would be bad, or making her technically improve without letting her know that she is poor. She believes in the team and cares about it and we wouldn't lose her".

Let's analyze the statement of a manager in the sports field by breaking down the sentence:

1. We have a willing coach → rep. JUDGMENT
2. always proactive → rep. SANCTIONING REALITY
3. and engaging → rep. JUDGMENT
4. but technically poor. → rep. JUDGMENT
5. the difficulty is finding her a role → rep. JUDGMENT
6. because losing her would be bad → rep. JUDGMENT
7. or making her technically improve → rep. JUDGMENT
8. without letting her know that she is poor. → rep. JUDGMENT
9. she believes in the team and cares about it → rep. OPINION
10. and we wouldn't lose her. → rep. POSSIBILITY

We have broken down the manager's answer into 10 sentences with a minimal portion of text with meaning.

The repertoire of the JUDGMENT is used 7 times, SANCTION OF REALITY once, OPINION once and POSSIBILITY once.

Classifying the repertoires used according to the categories of maintenance, hybrid or generative, we see:

- 9 maintenance repertoires
- 1 hybrid repertoire

Also in this second example, analyzing a statement reported by a manager, it is highlighted that 9 out of 10 are repertoires that do not "help", they do not generate new scenarios. As a result, they do not help to "unblock" the current situation or to move forward towards new solutions.

5 Conclusion

When we communicate, and in the specific case when we describe a problem, we think we are "neutral" or "objective", when, instead, the discursive modalities we use contain personal and subjective interferences. In the above examples, the people interviewed mainly used the mode of judgment, a very personal mode, imbued with their own beliefs and ideas. The second-most commonly used repertoire is "Sanctioning Reality", a modality strictly connected with the personal vision of the world and of the facts; and furthermore with the intent to make it absolute in space and time (e.g.: definitely, necessarily) .

When we communicate, when we act, are we aware of our words? Of our behaviour?

How often do we record our communication to analyze "how" we describe a situation, a problem?

Referring to the answers analyzed previously, we used a judging discursive modality 7 times out of 9. About 80% of our speech (or behaviour) is made up of judgment.

In behaviours and in the use of hateful expressions/phrases, it is judgment the prevailing modality used.

Understanding how we communicate means knowing how to analyze if (and how) we can make different communication choices in different situations.

The Dialogic Model briefly presented helps us to identify different methods (and therefore choices) of communication. Judgment, from the analysis of all the answers to the questionnaires, is one of the communication methods we use most frequently in our interactions, even if we often do not realize we are doing it; and even when a "judgment" is not required.

"Training" in communication, also with a view to modify certain behaviours related to hate speech, means changing and varying our communication methods (and behaviours).

References

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