Techniques and Methods of Cooperation and Communication

Prof. Dr. Henning Pätzold & Dr. Alexander Wick

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Brief Information on the Authors

Prof. Dr. Henning Pätzold

Born in 1971, MA. and PhD in adult education. Professor for general pedagogy and adult education at the Freie Hochschule Mannheim (academy for the education of teachers at Waldorf-Steiner schools) and the University of Kaiserslautern. Experience and research in the fields of school pedagogy, adult education, communication training, media education, learning theory and educational responsibility. About sixty articles and four books on different topics in the field of educational science.

Dr. Alexander Wick

Diplom-Psychologe (University degree in Psychology), PhD, born in 1970, worked for many years in the field of management and personnel consulting and as lecturer in international educational transfer settings. He has been a lecturer and scientist in Psychology and Educational Science at the Universities of Kaiserslautern and Heidelberg. He is also head of HR Management branch of study at the International University of Cooperative Education (IBA), Darmstadt, Germany.

Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives

The students should

- be capable of reflecting on their own conduct of communication.
- send and receive messages collectively.
- take a supportive stance during discussions.
- overcome communication barriers.
- be able to apply methods of communication suitable to the situation at hand.
- prepare and evaluate discussions constructively.
- hold constructive staff meetings.
- handle conflicts and conflict resolution talks successfully and
- have the ability to effectively chair meetings and conferences.

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Glossary of Terms

Constructivism

In its narrow sense, constructivism is a particular branch of epistemology which can be followed back to its roots in antique philosophy, but which has gained particular importance since the 1970s. The core idea of constructivism is that any epistemological realisation is tightly bound to the individual subject. There is no possible procedure to ensure that two different subjects have the same idea and awareness of a given entity. Consequently, the concept of constructivism poses the idea that there is no absolute truth. Instead, an idea has to prove its connectivity within communication.

Communication

Information transfer between persons. Most often limited to intended social exchange of information.

Cooperation

The working together of individuals by coordinating individual resources, expertise, and experiences for a common purpose or benefit that cannot be reached otherwise or only with much higher cost and with less efficiency. Communication and organisation are the major means of managing cooperation.

Information

Due to a common definition by Gregory Bateson, information is "a difference that makes a difference". This means that any difference (e.g. between two states) can be regarded as information at the very moment in which some observer beholds the difference as meaningful in any respect (see message, understanding).

Message

A message is any kind of utterance, written text etc., that is understood by somebody else (see information, understanding).

Metacommunication

Metacommunication is usually defined as "communication about communication" (Leeds-Hurwitz 1989: 138). More precisely it means the shift from a certain issue of a discussion to communication about the discussion itself.

Moderation

The task of conducting a discussion without primarily contributing to its content.

Reflection

Deeper consideration of thoughts, ideas and experiences with the aim of obtaining a different or more elaborated view of them.

Side-effect

Any effect which occurs due to the application of a substance, a concept etc. and is not intended as the main effect of it. Often we talk of "unintended side-effects" to emphasise that they are not wanted.

Understanding

Understanding means to realise that there is not only a message (i.e. any observable utterance etc.), but also some information beyond that (see information, message).

1 Introduction

Introductory exercise

With the so much talking taking place in the world, have you ever thought of a break in communication, at least a few minutes of shutting down any communication with the outside world? If so, you may have found it quite difficult to get a precise picture of what that would mean. In fact, we could immediately start with an experiment on that:

Activity 1:

Try to stop all communication for a minute. You may close your eyes and lie back to do so – the important thing is not to communicate at all.

If you tried to perform this little exercise you may have had a variety of experiences. You will notice that you seem unable to shut out the outside world. Thoughts of things to be done come to your mind, as well as things you would like to say to others or ask others. But even if you have been quite successful in not thinking of others too much, your 'communication break' was a reaction to this study text, in which we suggested you to do so. And as you come back to the text and reflect on the relationship between your experience and the words you are reading at the moment, you are engaged in a sort of communication (between reader and author), of which the exercise itself has been a part. In fact there has not really been a break in communication at all (or otherwise we would have to regard it as a break whenever our vis-à-vis stops to think before s/he answers). Later on in this study text we will look at this issue more closely. For the moment we should keep in mind that communication is at the very core of our conscious and cognitive processes. There is no social life without communication, no development between people and certainly no education.

Just because communication is so central to life, it is a concept which is quite difficult to grasp. There are very different approaches to this phenomenon of communication, stemming from philosophy, social sciences, psychology, evolutionary biology etc. Each of these fields contribute to the picture of communication making it even more complicated than how it is discussed in the different fields – which is ultimately has to do with communicating about concepts of communication. In fact this is one of the fundamental characteristics of our topic: communication as an object of discussion presupposes itself and we may never reach the starting point of it by communication.

Everyday understanding

But although communication is a very complex matter of philosophical dispute, we all may claim to be quite experienced in it and have a quite comprehensive everyday understanding of this concept, a broad and complex mental model. We know that communication relies on language, speech (or written words or signs etc.), understanding, exchange of information, attention etc. We have special experiences with communication, which may result in individual convictions (e.g. about the signs which show if somebody is lying).

In some ways, this makes learning about communication easier, in other ways, it makes it difficult. On the one hand one doesn't have to start from the scratch when learning about communication, on the other hand some of the existing convictions may be very strong even though they do not correspond with elaborated theories of communication. For example we often tend to think that communication is the conveyance of information (and we will elaborate on this approach below), whilst the constructivist theory tells us that it is rather a case of re-constructing than just capturing the bits of information. Furthermore we all learned to communicate more or less effectively without learning about the theories of communication. However, to work effectively with particular methods and tools of communication, it is useful if there are theoretical categories at one's disposal.

Overview

The following study text will provide you with some of these categories. They are intended to facilitate the use of and reflection on methods and tools of communication and cooperation and we hope that they will also enrich your individual mental models of communication. The study text is organised into three sections. The first section will deal with communication theory and place it in a relationship to cooperation (which is mainly discussed in the study text Team development and cooperation). The second section will deal with different approaches to communication, it will take a look at the concept of metacommunication and finally turn to the practical aspect of the role of a moderator in discussions. The third section will discuss the general aspects of methods and tools of communication and cooperation. It will start with some thoughts on the suitability of 'recipes' and 'rules' in social processes, then with their risks and side effects and conclude with a proposal on how best to organise and categorise the different methods and tools. This third section also presents the actual tools and methods selected for this study text. Each of the methods is introduced briefly, followed by a description of typical situations of application, examples and variations.

versa). Of course such misunderstandings could result in unpleasant situations. Imagine a student asking for help with some problems in learning English. You could advise him to practice "conversation" but if he gets you wrong, he might, for example, immediately go for "real conversation" in authentic situations with native speakers and will soon have the feeling that things are becoming even worse. He might then blame himself for being incapable of learning English at all – or he might blame you for giving him a wrong advice. In situations of communication, however, the aim is usually to come to a mutual understanding (below, we'll also discuss some exceptions to this rule). But, if communication is a matter of luck, how can we at least raise the "hit rate"?

Improve communication

We can simply follow the strategy a gambler would apply to raise chances in a game, where coincidence plays an important role: Try to find out about the obvious as well as the hidden rules of the game to reduce the influence of chance as much as possible and acquire techniques for dealing with the typical challenges of the game. So we have to find out about the "rules" of communication and then look at some proven techniques of communication. The term "rules" in our context means a bit more than what is written down in a manual. Of course there are rules of communication (which are largely depending on cultural settings), but the rules in our sense are rather set through the theories of communication. Again this situation is similar to that of gambling. A gambler wouldn't be satisfied with just knowing the written rules, but s/he would also exert a lot of effort in learning about different chances, probabilities etc. to develop excellent skills in the game. So, in the next two parts we will deal with two approaches to communication, which are quite prominent in educational sciences. We will start with a rather practical concept connected with the names of Karl Bühler, Paul Watzlawick and Friedeman Schulz von Thun (of which we'll primarily relate to the latter). Their concept is particularly appropriate for dealing with typical sources of misunderstanding which usually lead to vast difficulties in communication. It has therefore gathered a widespread use in different types of communication trainings of which those with an educational focus are emphasised on.

The following section will deal with the point of view of systems theory. One has to admit that this perspective is not that closely related to practical use as the former, but as we not only aim to increase communicative skills but also to think of communication and deal with unforeseen situations, it would be useful to pay a bit more attention to fundamental theories. Anyway, most of the part on practical techniques of communication and cooperation can be understood without applying this theoretical perspective so you might skip it when first reading this study text.

2.1 Communication from a technical point of view – some preliminaries

A simple model of communication ...

To understand communication we should at first develop a *very simple* model of communication and then further introduce the complexities step by step. Probably the easiest way to imagine communication is to look at those who are acting as two persons who exchange something (cf. Figure 2.1):

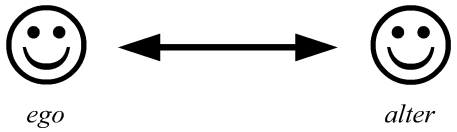

Figure 2.1: *A very simple model of communication*

According to the sociological tradition the two actors are named with the Latin words for I (*ego*) and the other (*alter*). As the model is very simple, it doesn't even state, what exactly it is, that is exchanged. At this place, let us just assume it is a message, information or something similar. To deal with communication from an analytical point of view it might be useful to distinguish between somebody who is uttering something and another person who is listening. Of course we have to keep in mind that these two roles are constantly changing in most situations of face-to-face communication. This leads us to the famous "sender-receiver-model of communication" (cf. Figure 2.2):

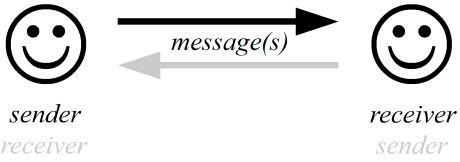

Figure 2.2: *The sender-receiver-model of communication (simple form)*

... and its development

This model already shows a bit of what we need to examine communication from an analytical perspective – yet it doesn't contribute much to explaining misunderstandings. We can merely distinguish two situations: Either the message reaches the receiver or it doesn't. But our experience is that misunderstanding has its roots in situations where the message, which reaches the receiver, seems different from what the sender sent. This leads to a further complication of the model and we have to introduce two important processes. First, we assume that the sender wants to tell ("communicate") something. But this isn't already the message. We may think of it as a particular idea, thought or even a section of the consciousness. Yet, to become a message it has to be transformed into words, gestures or any other carrier of meaning. This process is usually called coding. On the other hand the receiver does not simply "put" the message into his mind. He listens, reads or watches some signs, words or letters and interprets them, which means, he gives them meaning according to his personal knowledge of the language, his former experience with similar and different messages etc. This process is usually called "decoding". Furthermore, the possibility that the transfer of the message could be distorted may be taken into account (cf. Figure 2.3).

Coding and decoding

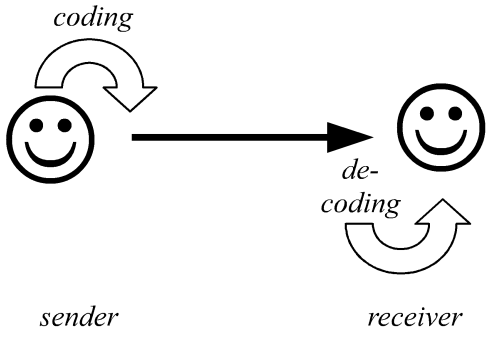

Figure 2.3: *The sender-receiver-model (more complex form)*

Misunderstanding

This model is still not too complicated but it already offers a variety of opportunities to understand how misunderstanding could arise. Misunderstandings could occur due to problems in coding, decoding or in the transportation of the message and usually we all have experience with each of such cases. If for example the sender tries to convey a complex idea in a short time and therefore leaves out some necessary intermediate steps, the receiver might be unable to understand it. If, on the other hand, the receiver makes use of some presumptions the sender doesn't share while decoding the message, he might easily come up with something quite different from what the sender had in mind. And finally, even the most simple disruption of the transportation of the message (like talking in a loud environment) might result in virtually any kind of misunderstanding. Now, since the model is quite technical we could take a look at the technical ways of dealing with these difficulties. We could simply imagine the sender and the receiver to be, let's say, two computers connected by a data line. The communication could then take the form of coding information (e.g. a picture) in a certain data format (e.g. JPEG Format), transferring it via a data line (e.g. a network cable) and decoding it to reproduce it on the other computer as depicted in Figure 2.4:

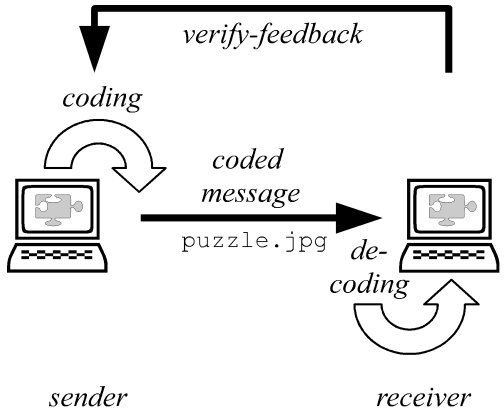

Figure 2.4: *A technical view of the sender-receiver-model*

Feedback

Now a technician could introduce a feedback mechanism, in which the receiver sends some kind of verification code back to the sender to verify if it has received the data correctly. The feedback might consist of some sample data of the original file, a checksum or something more complicated. In this way,

securing communication against misunderstanding seems simple. One just has to establish an appropriate feedback channel to ensure that the information has been transmitted correctly. Of course this method has some undesired side effects and, in addition, is based on some tricky presumptions:

- Establishing a feedback loop increases the amount of communication to be performed. It would be time-consuming (and quite boring) to verify each sentence ego says to alter.

- There is no general concept for dealing with errors in communication. Of course it may start again if the feedback shows errors, but if there is a fundamental problem in the communication process, this could easily result in an infinite loop.

- A simple feedback loop wouldn't provide any information about where and why the transmission went wrong. This would rather require complex methods of "metacommunication" (Meidinger 2000: 100) which obviously go beyond the technical metaphor of communication.

- Up till now we assumed that there is a linear relation between the message in its different forms (mind of the sender, coded message, mind of the receiver). Our experience tells us something different and so does communication sciences. Most of us may have experienced the fact that something becomes clear in the very moment we try to explain it to somebody else. In this case the message (in its coded form) is not only new to alter, but also ego decodes it and by that acquires new information.

- The coded message is something objective such that any neutral observer can find out the correct content, regardless of any potential differences in the interpretation of this content. This holds true, more or less, for digital data transferred by a data line, as it consists of a series of well distinguished differences (e.g. in voltage). Yet, in human communication we cannot rely on this presumption at all. Even the question, what actually belongs to the "data" might be a matter for debate (e.g. some people seem to draw more information out of the handwriting of a letter than out of the words).

To deal with these presumptions and the side effects, we will leave the metaphor of technical communication and now turn to a perspective which is largely based on a social sciences view, particularly on constructivism and the idea of several levels of communication.

Activity 2:

Imaging situations in which you experience communication according to the paragraph above, i.e. situations of communication, in which the sender also gains new information out of her/his utterance.

2.1.1 A constructivists view of communication

According to results obtained hitherto, there are three crucial points in the model of communication, which deserve further investigation:

- The process of coding and decoding cannot be covered by simply describing it from a technological point of view.
- The path of the coded message is complex as there is no clear distinction between the message itself and its surrounding.
- Feedback and verification may be useful to increase the quality of communication, but it has to be also regarded as a communicative process itself.

The first point is particularly addressed by the broadly discussed concept of constructivism and we will take a closer look at it in the following paragraphs. The second is related to rather general questions of language and is dealt with in the subject of semiotics (Crystal 2008). We will look at it from an educational point of view, only. The third point lays a certain emphasis on communication and cooperation techniques. Later on we will provide communication techniques which deal with the task of using feedback to avoid misunderstanding.

2.2 A psychological-pedagogical perspective – constructivism and the contributions of Bühler, Watzlawick and Schulz von Thun

Constructivism: origin and development

In the last two decades, constructivism has developed from a respected but small branch of interdisciplinary theory building (with the most important contributions stemming from cybernetics and biology) to a popular paradigm in social sciences. Today it seems even risky to deal with any educational subject of importance without at least discussing the constructivist view on it. Though educational sciences are not generally immune to fashionable trends, there are more and better reasons for the rising popularity of this (originally epistemological) concept in being so successful in delivering an interpretation background for educational processes. One of the main reasons – and obviously the most important one regarding (our) topic –, is that constructivism offers opportunities to merge the fundamental processes of cognition and communication (and even action) without losing the analytical advantages of separating them. Naturally, this approach has its predecessors. In language philosophy we already find a close relationship between thinking and action:

> *"Thinking [...] is not something that must be related to behaviour. Thinking is behaviour. Thinking is action just as real, just as historical, just as behavioural as operating a machine, fighting a war or eating a meal" (Hoopes 1991: 9).*

From this point of view, it takes only a small step to bind several related procedures (thinking, realising, cognition, talking ...) together. The famous research work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1992) underpinned this point of view with experimental results as well as with theoretical reflection. And Heinz von Foerster, one of the representatives of the "cybernetic branch" of constructivism, put the idea of cognition in a relationship to calculation (Foerster 1984) – cognition is regarded as a kind of calculation of reality. The core idea of classic constructivism is that any registration of reality is related to the observer's condition. We would all easily agree to the idea that several people see some items differently – according to their standpoint, the condition of their eyes, their concentration etc. But simultaneously we assume that there is no correct way of seeing this item. Someone of sound mind, disposing of memory and taking on the optimal perspective towards the item, should be able to see it that way. Constructivism rejects this idea in stating that any observation of reality is bound to a kind of interpretation which is inseparably bound to the way, the human mind works. Therefore there is no way to perceive the "real item" at all.

There is a widespread discussion on whether this holds true for all processes of perception and cognition. Fortunately we don't need to take a stand in this argument because our discussion only deals with communication. Yet, the constructivist's ideas are illuminating in that context because we might agree that another person's mind is in any case beyond our direct access. Apart from certain medical or spiritual treatments, we can certainly only assume the thoughts someone has in mind through what he is saying. He may say that he is sad and we might believe it or not (according to the way he says it, the circumstances, the body language, our further knowledge of him etc.) but we do not know for sure. Therefore we should have a closer look at the processes of coding and decoding.

In the traditional sender-receiver-model coding means that ego transforms a 'piece of mind' into a coded message. This message is characterised by the fact that it takes the form of a chain of signs which can be sent, i.e. transferred through a message channel. There are lots of possibilities for either of them: The signs system might be that of spoken language (each word is a "sign" pointing at some object, idea etc.), of written language, but also music, icons etc. are possible. The channel consists of a particular use of a medium of transfer, like a telephone wire, written pages, air etc. Placing the different possible disturbances in the transportation process aside, the crucial point in the coding process is the actual relationship between the "piece of mind" and the message. Is there a 'real' way to transform a certain idea, opinion or something alike into a coded message, regardless of the code you use?

Activity 3:

Imagine any idea you could code to convey to somebody else.

1. Think about different ways to convey the message (like different formulations etc.).
2. Think about alternative ways you would code the message with respect to a particular target group (students, a 3 years old child, near relatives, somebody from a different country).
3. Which of the various ways of coding the message was the 'right' one?
4. If there were different 'right' solutions – what are the reasons for the differences?

The coding obviously depends on whom we are going to address and what meaning(s) we wish to convey. There are rather everyday examples showing that the message code is not only dependent on an isolated idea but also on a lot of circumstances. For example, if we are foreign to a city and ask somebody for the way, it could take the form 'could you please tell me the way to the station, sir'. If we ask a friend or a relative, the 'same' question, it could simply be coded with the sentence 'where is the station?'. By asking a simple question, we also implicitly convey some ideas about our relationship to *alter*.

The "anatomy" of a message – content and relation

This leads us to a very prominent idea on communication, which Paul Watzlawick (again an important representative of constructivist thinking) and his colleagues introduced in the late 1960s (Watzlawick et al. 1967). Watzlawick states that every message consists of two parts: a content part and a relation part[2]. The content part covers the meaning of the sentence 'at first sight'. In our example it would be the request to know where the station is. The relation part is a kind of classification of the former. By uttering the message in a specific context, the content is qualified in a certain way. For example, using the second version of our question ('where is the station') in the first situation described (asking a stranger) could lead to a different interpretation (alter might e.g. think that you are in a hurry or could refuse to answer because he thinks it was rude of you etc.). By his description of the communication process Watzlawick introduces a kind of hierarchy: The relation part delivers a frame or interpretational background for the content (cf. Figure 2.5).

In other words, the relation determines how the content is to be understood. And as constructivism shows evidence that there is no absolute meaning of the content at all, the relationship in fact determines the content itself. But on the other hand the content is not free of influence on the relationship. This is obvious looking at messages like 'I like you'. But also in our example the questions contain information or presumptions concerning the relationship between *alter*

2 In fact this is one of five axioms on communication stated by Watzlawick et al. Some of the others will be discussed later. For an overview see Coates (2009, pp 167ff), a good introductory material on communication provided as a free e-book.

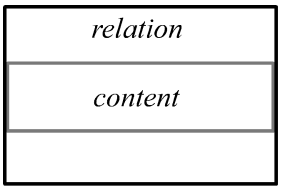

Figure 2.5: *Relation and content according to Watzlawick et al.*

and *ego*. At least the latter expects *alter* to be in a relationship with him that will make him answer the question[3]. So there are good reasons not to see content and relation as being hierarchical but as equals. Furthermore, a closer look at the question reveals more aspects of the message. It is aimed at making *alter* not only to receive a message, but also to react in a certain way (in this case: to answer) – it contains an appeal. This is an aspect of the message, which Karl Bühler already pointed out in his organon model (see http://www.uni-kassel.de/fb8/misc/lfb/html/text/6-3frame.html for a short description). It has been further developed by Friedemann Schulz von Thun (1998), to the so-called 'message square'. Schulz von Thun distinguished four sides of a message, which are always represented in one way or the other in any utterance. In addition to the content and the relationship we have the appeal and the self revelation. Uttering any message therefore means that I am

Schulz von Thun's "message square"

- conveying a certain content,
- stating a relationship,
- articulating an appeal and
- revealing something about myself.

To make it clear that these aspects are not ordered in any hierarchical manner, Schulz von Thun presented his model as a square (see Figure 2.6), where each side could be the highest (or lowest) and where no particular sequence of the sides is defined.

Activity 4:

Remember the communication situation of the last exercise (or imagine a new one). Think about only one sentence in the communication and examine, which of the message parts in terms of the appeal, the self revelation, the content and the relationship are conveyed in the message.

3 This is not to be taken for granted. If, for example, *alter* is a taxi driver at work, the relationship between him and *ego* could be defined as a server-client-relationship and it would be less probable that the driver would just tell *ego* the way instead of offering to drive him to the station.

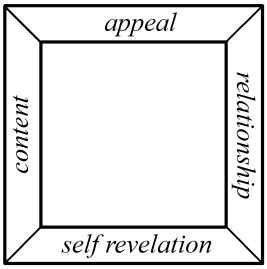

Figure 2.6: *The message square (Schulz von Thun 1998)*

Up to this point the model of Schulz von Thun is rather of a theoretical nature, it illuminates the coding process by describing the anatomy of a message in an analytical way. To achieve practical value we have to extend its meaning to the process of decoding and put both together in our former sender-receiver model (cf. Figure 2.7). Schulz von Thun stated that coding and decoding can both be analysed with the same model. For this reason he spoke of communication with four mouths and four ears. Not only does any utterance consist of the four message parts as described above, but also any receiver will look for those four parts simultaneously – as if s/he would listen with four ears.

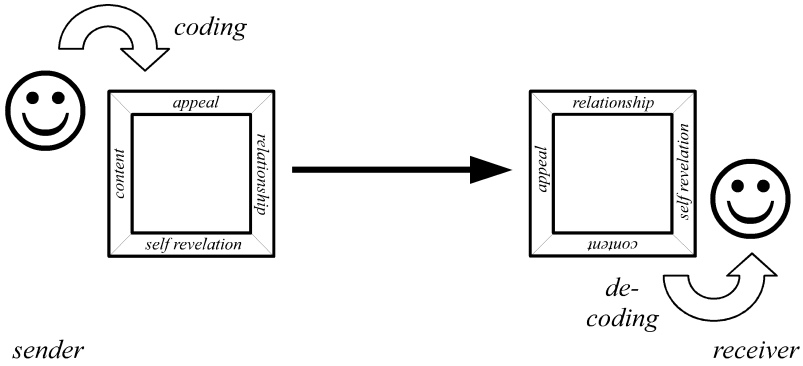

Figure 2.7: *Sender-receiver-model and message square combined*

Of course this is not unperilous. As we discussed earlier, there is no guarantee that the sender's intention is received correctly by the receiver. In fact the concept of the message square reveals a lot of typical forms of misunderstanding, which would be quite difficult to detect without a similar analytical tool. The literature on the four ear model delivers a lot of examples:

Example Imagine a mother welcoming the adult daughter after she has been away for a longer period of time[4]. The mother says:

"It's nice that you are here again"

Now, what could be the possible meanings of this sentence according to the different message parts? The content is obvious: The presence of the daughter

4 This example is taken from http://www.slideshare.net/kprabhakar975/key-principles-of-communication-by-madam-marinita-schumacher.

is a joyous matter. The relationship could be defined by that fact: The mother is happy if the daughter is at home – and maybe she's not happy any more if the daughter is absent. Following that possibility, the self-revelation could be that the mother feels lonely. Consequently, the appeal might be that the daughter shall visit her mother more often. It is important to emphasise that this is only a suggestion of an interpretation. Of course things could be interpreted completely differently, especially if more information is given on the situation:

Activity 5:

Imagine that the mother said her welcoming words in a sarcastic tone. What could be the different appropriate interpretations on the four levels of the message?

Thus one of the most important sources of misunderstanding is that the sender primarily intended to send a message on one of the four levels while the receiver "listened" to it on another level. In our example it could easily be the case that the mother primarily aimed at expressing the fact that she is just happy to see her daughter. The daughter in return listened primarily with the "appeal-ear" and gets the feeling of being blamed for having been away for a long time. We could continue this example with an answer accordingly (see Table 2.1).

Mother: It's nice that you are here again.	Mother talking with the 'content mouth': I'm happy to meet you. Daughter listening with the 'appeal ear': I expect you to come more often.
Daughter: I'm very sorry, but my studies also require a bit of time.	Daughter answering with the self 'revelation mouth'. Mother listening with the content ear.
Mother: Oh, I understand this. Then maybe you will have no time to attend my birthday party in spring!	Mother answering with the content mouth. Daughter listening with the self revelation ear, thinking that her mother is not happy to see her.

Table 2.1: *A short interaction with different "ears" and "mouths"*

This example shows how the intended message can change to its complete opposite just by a short series of misunderstandings. It doesn't even seem as if one of the interaction partners has made a particular mistake. Therefore a major strategy in dealing with communication tasks and preventing communication failure is to analyse whether the messages are sent and received on similar levels (and, of course, if they are sent and understood coherently within those levels). A number of tools described below will deal with this issue.

2.3 Interim conclusions

By now we should be able to accept that it is a matter of luck, if communication works. Yet there are important ways of influencing it. First it is obviously helpful to check the external conditions of the communication situation. Is it designed in a way that helps mutual understanding rather than impedes it? Often elementary conditions are overseen – is everybody able to understand everybody else physically, i.e. is the "transmission channel" appropriate. The next step would be to concentrate on coding and decoding: Is it likely that the participants have a command of similar vocabulary concerning the matter under discussion? Are there any particular language barriers? In chapter 4 a checklist is provided to evaluate communication situations according to those demands.

Activity 6:

You may now provide a first personal check list to ensure the effectiveness of communication yourself and compare your results to the proposal in chapter four.

2.4 Message, information and understanding – the systems theory perspective

Authors in the field of systems theory have filled shelves with writings on the issue of communication. This is mainly because communication not only plays a central role in sociological systems theory, but also because the term is used quite differently from its everyday meaning. In our considerations hitherto, communication was something happening between two or more individuals with the aim of reaching a mutual understanding. The success of communication can be estimated by the extent to which this aim is fulfilled. Systems theory, on the contrary, has no concept of successful communication at all. This is the deeper sense of the above mentioned one-liner, that it is a matter of luck. It is not people who interact to build social systems in which they communicate, but social systems exist by communication without paying attention to the individuals at all. This may sound a bit weird, but it is not much more than a change of perspective. Linear approaches (like the sender-receiver-model) assume that communication is generated by individuals. They give utterances, understand, answer etc. and the result is a communicative process. This perspective is quite useful in everyday life, but obviously it has its limits. We have seen, for example, that the process of coding and decoding not only has to do with certain coding systems, but may be much more complex and even have backlashes to the sender or receiver. Furthermore, the sender presents himself to the others, by continuously sending messages of self revelation. Consequently, he permanently produces (intentionally or unintentionally) a picture of himself due to his communicative action and the others receive this picture – filtered and alienated by their individual ways of decoding. Again, their answer doesn't directly relate to the sender himself but to the picture they have of him. An

Communication and social systems

answer is the answer to a message, which has undergone the processes of coding and decoding, and the answer itself has undergone such processes. Furthermore, they are not linearly determined, which means, we cannot precisely foresee what result a communicative act will have in the mind of *alter* (nor could we precisely investigate if we were right or wrong). From an analytical point of view we now have no reason to reject the hypothesis, that communication is only loosely bound to the minds of the individuals.

Consequently, communication takes place in its own system (which systems theory calls the "social system") and although the participating individuals are necessary to produce communicative action, the communication does not relate to them (cf. Figure 2.8).

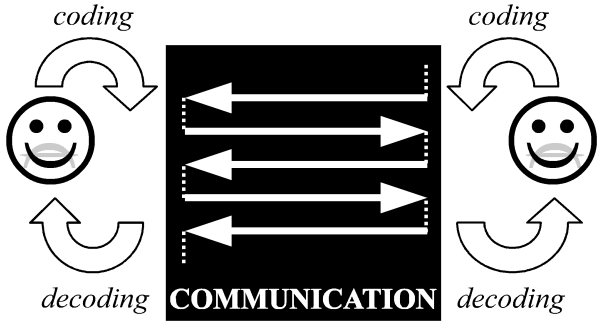

Figure 2.8: *Communication as a social system*

Communication is without beginning

Rather, communication *always relates to prior communication*. This is an unfamiliar way of looking at the phenomena. Instead of putting the individual (or a community) in the focus, we look at the communication itself and find out what remains after stripping it of all unnecessary contributions of the individuals. And we find out that what remains is the core of the communicative process. Teachers in systems theory usually share the experience that this is not an idea that is very easy to grasp. Therefore, before following it to its consequences (and they will eventually draw our attention back to the individuals), we should spend a short time on some misunderstandings that could arise:

- This approach doesn't try to create any hierarchy between the individuals, the group and the communicative processes. Neither is the communication "more important" than the individuals, nor does it convey the idea that any kind of group or community is somehow contained in the communication and therefore superior to the individual. It just states that communication is something different from one person talking to the other. From a systems theory perspective, the individuals *surround* the social system constituted by communication.

- Communication depends on individuals producing utterances. Metaphorically speaking, it is simply that they are rather feeding than producing communication.

- Communication is linked to prior communication and has no beginning and no end. Certainly we can end a discussion, but we cannot end

communication itself. Therefore, analysing a certain talk, speech etc. always means cutting out some occurrence from a virtually unlimited context. (Nevertheless it is often useful to do so.)

- The systems theory is somewhat hermetic. It reveals important aspects of communication, but on the other hand it tends to complicate or even hide other things which seem so obvious. Therefore it should be kept in mind that for several tasks other models are more fruitful for analysing communication.

- Last but not least, this perspective does not claim to offer the "right" way to look at communication, rather it aims at providing an analytical perspective, in which some hidden characteristics of communication become more clear.

Activity 7:

Before you proceed reading, try to recall the most important aspects of the system theory model yourself.

Brief summary

So, I hope you are motivated to follow these thoughts through a few more paragraphs. Let's recollect: Communication is related to communication (instead of individuals). The individuals are a necessary surrounding for communication, providing communicative action. Yet, what exactly happens from this point of view, when we say "Michelle said to Peter that it is time to go home" – and Peter stands up and takes his coat?

In systems theory, communication consists of three parts, which can be separated analytically though being bound together in reality (Luhmann 1995; Baraldi et al. 1997). They are message, information and understanding. First, there has to be a message. Somebody has to produce a message by talking, writing down something, making a gesture etc. To be a message in communication it is also necessary that it contains information. For example when ego scratches his head, *alter* might not at all react on this. In that case there was no information in the gesture. But *alter* might also react, e.g. by trying to explain something. In that case the message was *understood*, which means *alter* has realised that it was not only a gesture from *ego*, but that there was also some information in it (scratching one's head → "this is difficult"). Understanding in this sense means something similar to the differentiation between the content and other levels of a message. It means to realise that there is not only a message (i.e. any observable utterance etc.), but also some information beyond that.

When Michelle said to Peter: "It's time to go home" and Peter takes up his coat, communication has taken place: From Peters point of view, Michele's message ("It's time to go home") carried information – he understood it. As an observer we draw this conclusion by the fact that he is taking up his coat, which is an action that is coherent with Michelle's message.

Activity 8:

Again you can also apply the model of the message square to this case: What could be possible message parts on all four levels (from the senders and the receiver's perspective)?

However, the idea that Peter's action of fetching his coat is a kind of response to Michelle's statement is our assumption as observers (and here systems theory and the constructivist perspective meet). We don't know if Peter had decided anyway to take his coat and we don't know either, if Michelle didn't actually mean to leave immediately etc. Actually we can't even be sure if one of them really "understood" something out of the speech/gesture of the other at all. As an observer, we can only see that there were actions, which are coherent with an insinuated but ultimately invisible process of communication.

The systems theory perspective doesn't offer immediate opportunities for application in creating and maintaining communication situations. In fact it rather seems to distract from the simpler and more convincing linear models like the sender-receiver-model. But it draws our attention to three important aspects of communication, which also might help to overcome a variety of difficulties.

Pitfalls of communication from system theories point of view

Don't overestimate the spoken (or written) word. We examined communication as a process related to itself (communication reacts to communication). Therefore we should not be too surprised if some utterances lead to acceptance or rejection of the social and communicative situation rather than the actual issue. If we rush through some tricky points of a question, we might find it easy to gain affirmation from others but we should not be too sure that everybody will remember this agreement the same way we do. Rather it is quite probable that the affirmation was due to the social situation – a phenomenon which is commonly used to talk somebody into doing something. On the contrary we could spend a particular time on inconvenient issues, especially if we wish to establish a common ground for further action, where participants have to rely on one another.

Communication is a process – and so is agreement. In technical terms, there is no such thing as communication between individuals, rather individuals are the creators as well as the observers of communication. Consequently, individuals cannot agree on certain issues by communication. However, they can observe communication and from that observation derive meaning which can be coherent, and which results in an agreement. Though this seems to be a rather technocratic point of view it is quite important. We often regard agreement as a result of successful communication and to a certain extent this is a useful model. Our agreement – i.e. our mutually shared point of view on some issues – is a result of our observation of communication, in which this point of view continuously turns out to be accurate. Still this position needs constant reconfirmation, and therefore it is necessary not just to firm up an agreement (e.g. by a written document, a publication etc.) but also to reconfirm it within the communicative process and by the actions one takes.

It's the system that develops. No matter how important individuals may be as pioneers, drivers or creators of innovation, a complex process of development cannot be maintained sustainably by one or a few persons. It is important that the leading figures in such a process know and agree about the means and goals, but still the whole plan must reach the minds (and hearts) of all those who are involved. Systemic thinking reminds us that ideas deploy their strength not in the mind of an individual but in the communicative process itself, where their power to motivate and inspire can be observed by all participants. A saying of systemic consultants therefore recommends bringing information into the system rather than to the individual.

2.5 Mutual understanding: The goal of communication and its attendant circumstances

School development

Following these theoretical considerations, we should now take a closer look at communication in its specific position at the core of school development. In fact any process of school development is at one stage or the other, closely based on communication. You can't create a school program without discussing it, neither can you develop the relationship between the teachers and the parents or the school and its social environment without communication. Even the slightest change in the learning culture has to be communicated in one way or the other to become a vital element in the change of schools. On the other hand, communication is not all, as we already saw above. Things will not develop just by talking about development. On the other hand, only few actions will be carried out as long as everybody acts individually, without communication and coordination. So we have to reflect on the chances as well as on the limits of communication. For now, we can put the relationship between communication and cooperation into a simple form:

Mnemonic sentence

Communication aims at a mutual understanding while cooperation aims at mutual results.

Accordingly, techniques and methods of communication aim at providing a situation, in which this mutual understanding can develop. Furthermore they shall ensure that this happens without negative side effects (e.g. ignoring the opinion of some participants, fostering conflicts in other areas etc.). To develop and use such techniques, it is necessary to know at their background, i.e. how they work with respect to the characteristics of communication in general.

Mutual understanding

The aspect of mutual understanding deserves a closer look. We already saw that this is a kind of process – mutual understanding has to be re-established constantly to build a basis for cooperation. Here is however, the place to state that communication is not just successful in cases where mutual understanding is realised in all controversial points. Actually there is no reason at all to expect a group of dedicated experts to agree on an issue in all points. Rather, they may be able to develop a common ground of mutual agreement, but there will also be vast factual differences. In this case communication techniques must

not try to dissolve those differences (as it would almost certainly result in a loss of information and also obligation). Nevertheless one has to deal with these contradictory positions. It is obvious that they might give rise to a lot of "social damage", if not treated appropriately. This can be illustrated with an example:

Example

A school plans to extend the role of self-directed learning. Hence the teacher's body decides on the agreement that each lesson will consist of at least one quarter of student-directed activity. The teachers are optimistic about the plan but there is a conflict between two of them concerning the question of grading. While one of them holds the opinion that grading should remain an exclusive task of the teacher, the other would like to allow the students to at least have a say in the matter of grading their performance. The question doesn't affect the actual state of the project and at this point, there is no need for a general decision on that. Possibilities of using a moderator to deal with the conflict could be

1. *to appease the opponents with the projection that "there will be a solution",*

2. *to take up the disagreement and seek a mutual solution immediately,*

3. *to try to divert the attention away from the crucial issue.*

Although any of these possibilities might work in a particular context, none of them seems to do justice to the case. The first one is nothing other than a way of calming down and the hidden message on the relationship level could be something like "this is not at all the forum to deal with your factual conflicts" – though it *is* an appropriate forum, but not just at this moment. The second one takes off power from other issues, which at this time probably deserve more attention than that of grading. The third reaction doesn't take the participants serious at all – not only those who are raising the issue, but all of them, as the moderator certainly oversteps his competence when s/he tries to draw the participants attention way in a manipulatory manner. But what *is* the problem? The different opinions on the issue may turn out to be important later. We just know that they are not important now. Since there is a consensus with the opponents on the issue of self-directed learning (they only disagree on grading), there is no controversy on what the discussion is aiming at. So the first suggestion above leads in the right direction: The issue is not to be discussed at the moment, but not because there will be a solution for that (how can we know?) but because there is no need for a solution at this time. Stating clearly that there *is* a controversy, but none which requires attention and work at this very moment could be a way to deal with the situation.

Of course, this again is a more theoretical explanation. It might easily occur that one of the opponents insists that the issue is of immediate importance. S/he could for example claim that the whole process depends on the question of if there will be appropriate ways of grading and that it is useless to spend

energy on further planning unless the question is resolved. Yet, a moderator might justifiably assert that *any* of the issues contributing to the whole picture might be of importance but that it is only possible to deal with them one after the other – and that it is eventually necessary to take the risk of failure if one of them later turns out to be unsolvable *and* essential for the process at the same time.

On communicatiin techniques

The example is a bit farfetched, but some more or less similar situations may not be too unfamiliar to you. The example is meant to show four important points with respect to communication techniques:

- There may be methods of communication (as presented below) to deal with communication tasks from a technical point of view. Yet they are in any case subordinate to the communication goals. For example, there are different ways of dealing with the question of finding a sequence for the different steps of a huge task in a group, but the problem will only be solved if there is a mutual understanding that the steps have to be put into a sequence and there is a mutual agreement that it is useful afterwards to deal with them accordingly.

- Conflicts involving factual issues may cause problems in communication, but they are not problems in themselves. Any two different humans will find that they don't agree on any possible question. But this leads to problems only if the different opinions are related to a mutual task.

- Therefore there are (in logical terms) two ways of deal with conflicts which may be regarded as appropriate: Solving them by using arguments, data etc. *or* proving that there is no need to solve them within a given task.

- What sounds convincing from a formal logical point of view, gets intermingled with emotional conditions and group dynamics in real life situations. Therefore both of the above mentioned ways can only be applied if it is possible for the opponents to accept a point of view in which the factual concepts are detached from personal preferences, former conflicts, means of power etc.

Circumstances

The latter point leads to the question of circumstances. To achieve mutual understanding we need a situation which allows everybody to independently reach a cognitive state which is in coherence with the position of the others. Obviously this is difficult as long as there are latent or open conflicts between the participants, which can be related to the issue. But there are more potential hindrances than that. Besides when dealing with conflicts, it is necessary to eliminate reasons for accidental misunderstanding and to establish power structures which allow the best possible opinion within the group to set the benchmark. Generally, accidental misunderstanding can be avoided by aiming at a communicative practise which is aware of the rules and characteristics of communication as described above. Specifically, it may often turn out useful to use strategies of metacommunication (see sections 4.2, 4.3). The question of power within communication may not be very obvious, but in fact it is at the core of a whole concept of communication called "Theory of Communicative Action"

(Habermas 1986). Habermas demands that a communicative situation should allow everybody to contribute equally to its results. He therefore states some rules which together form the rules of an “ideal speech situation” (Habermas 1986). Briefly, those rules shall ensure that a discussion’s aim of finding an acceptable position is not superimposed by any type of power. An example of the latter would be that a teacher doesn’t dare to criticise a problematic issue in a school because it is related to some decision of the headmaster who might not be open to that. In contrary a discussion in accordance with the concept of the ideal speech situation would not show any hierarchy which hinders some of the participants from making certain contributions while others would be allowed to do so. While this idea is quite similar to that of Watzlawicks Axioms on communication (see 4.7), the whole concept is a bit more complicated (see Cavalier et al., n.d. for a short introduction).

Activity 9:

What was our initial differentiation between communication and cooperation?

2.6 Metacommunication

The term metacommunication is used with a vast variety of meanings, which lead some authors to avoid using it at all (Coates 2009). In the variety of meanings there are two branches which can clearly be distinguished: While some authors use the term to mark ”communication about communication”, others use the term to denote the fact that each utterance may contain different messages (as we already saw above). Sometimes the literal meaning of a sentence in particular, and the impression it creates on the person listening are completely antithetic. The sentence ”you can trust me” could serve as an example. In several cases it may be understood as an opposite of what it originally says: By demanding trustfulness one reveals to the other that trust is nothing self-evident in their relationship. Watzlawick et al. (1967) applied the term metacommunication to this situation (see section 4.7), while Gregory Bates and others used it for both aspects in an earlier article (Bateson et al. 1956). Since we have already dealt with the simultaneity of different messages within the four-ear-model, we will apply the term metacommunication only to the former meaning.

Two levels of communication

In this perspective it is a concept that distinguishes two levels of communication that should be differentiated at least from a moderator’s perspective. Let us assume that a group of teachers discuss the performance of a particular student. While some claim that she has been improving vastly in the last months others just state that her performance is still very poor. The groups start to defend their position (though they not even necessarily contradict each other) and at this point the moderator interferes by suggesting a discussion on what is actually happening within the communication: ”In my opinion we are not discussing the case of ... but we are dealing with the difference between the development of performance and a particular state of it. Do you agree?”.

The moderator's intervention is an example of metacommunication. Instead of continuing with the ongoing discussion, s/he suggests conversing about the discussion itself. By asking, if the others agree, he makes it very clear that he wants to know their opinion of his analysis of the discussion – and not about the student's performance state or development.

Metacommunication definition

Generally, metacommunication can be defined as "communication about communication" (Leeds-Hurwitz 1989: 138). As we saw in the example, it aims at readjusting the focus of communication from the topic of discussion to the discussion itself. Of course this definition is only applicable when we agree about what the focus of discussion actually is. Of course there is often a "topic" (in our example it would be the progress of the student), but as we saw in the four-ears-model, this is so only at the content level. In addition to this, there is an ongoing "conversation" of self-revelations, appeals and messages on the relationship, which provides a kind of filter to focus on particular aspects in metacommunication. In our example, the moderator focuses on the content. S/he proposes the hypothesis that the topic of discussion be changed from a single student's case to the difference between development and performance. S/he might as well centre the focus on a certain relationship within the discussion, for example by saying "In my opinion there is a controversy in the foundations of assessment between ... and ...". It would also be possible to be very open in addressing the problem, e.g. by saying "To me it seems that there is some misunderstanding – what do you think?"

In any of the cases, metacommunication is a kind of offer to the participants to step back and look at the situation itself instead of its "content". It can be quite exonerating to do so as issues of social importance like conflicts are attenuated. It could also help in putting aside a conflict, whereby it sometimes frizzles out completely if it was a mere effect of group dynamics. On the other hand metacommunication can also be a means of avoiding a discussion on the issue at stake. Sometimes it may be annoying to interrupt a difficult but necessary process of clarification by changing to the meta-level. Furthermore the discussion on the meta-level could lead to further risks, e.g. a latent conflict, which arises by sometimes interrupting the other party or slightly playing down his/her contributions, it may become the centre of focus and it is not always that the group is prepared to deal with this open form of the conflict. Though from an idealistic point of view, communication should be free of being used for anything else other than the mutually chosen topic, in reality it is sometimes necessary to use language not only to clarify an issue but also to maintain social roles and relationships, which might also include conflicts. Therefore metacommunication is an approach which should be used carefully and retentively. Some methodical approaches to metacommunication are given in chapter 4.

2.7 Cooperation: A short summary

Models of collaboration

Cooperation is one of some possible models of collaboration within organisations (and other settings). Departments in organisations are usually accumulations of individualists. They are coordinated by organisation, leadership, and technology. Even if there is some kind of social organisation, each person does his own individual work to reach his given goals. This is called *coaction*. If smaller organisational units are organised not to work on a group of accomplishments but on a complete task or process without being fully organised by technological structuring, they will need personal *interaction* for coordinating the process of fulfilling their task as well as some internal social structuring. They may be called a work group. A team is the transformation of a group work, with each member doing their own job and interacting for fine tuning in contrast to working really together by joint action and self-organisation. This is called *cooperation*. Cooperation is of course also possible between two persons or within other units of organisations. But organised cooperation is most often realised with teams. There is a development of collaboration from coaction via interaction to cooperation towards complexity and additional effort as well as responsibility for the actors of these forms of collaboration. With this development, the problem solving, decision making, performance, and satisfaction level potentials of the units grow.

What is cooperation?

In summary, cooperation is the striving to coordinate individual resources, expertise, and experiences to reach goals that cannot be reached otherwise or only with much higher cost and with less efficiency. Interdependency and integration are crucial features of cooperation. Communication and organisation are the means to manage cooperation. It is a very complex concept and manifests individually in different settings and situations. Some of the most important features of cooperation are coordination, motivation, leadership, conflict, creativity, decision making, and problem solving.

Potential benefits of cooperation in teams

Benefits of cooperation in organisational work settings result from:

- More capacity by joint use of the individual resources.
- More views not only in amount but also in perspectives and diversity.
- Coordination and composition of different assets to reach more potential, synergy, and impact.
- More motivation, facilitation and mutual learning in the socially embedded setting.

Cooperation success by social and task orientation

Cooperation is a matter of social as well as task coordination. And social aggregates tend to develop dynamically. The usual social aggregates in organisations are some kind of groups and these are undergoing development. Efforts have been made to describe the course of group development in various ways with the approach by Bruce Tuckman (1965) being the most important and accepted. He describes it as being a sequence of some phases, usually four, rounded off by

a phase of group resolution. Of course, progress might be faster or slower. At all events, groups take some time before being able to perform at their best and the Tuckman phase sequence illustrates this well. He distinguishes between the Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning phases describing the sequence of growing integration, being integrated and final disintegration. During these phases the focus of group attention and activity differ in that they are being directed to social or task issue, going from more social to more task orientation and disintegrating in the end. But what is most important, is that in Tuckman's hypotheses it was often confirmed that for high performances (successfully achieved in organisational settings) the phases of Forming, Storming and Norming, are more focused on social aspects with low levels of performance on tasks and Storming in particular, is very prone to conflict.

Preconditions for cooperation

Cooperation is not managed by just putting people of high expertise on relevant domains in one unit and instructing them to cooperate. It's a comprehensive, complex field composed of at least three sectors of shaping:

1. People:
   Instructing individuals to cooperate will not succeed satisfactorily. Furthermore, it is even not enough to assess personal characteristics which are usually referred to as team-mindedness or the ability and willingness to work in a team. The members have to match altogether to form a work group or team. Every team is unique in its combination of resources as well as social dynamics and there are teams of wonderfully team oriented persons that do not perform too well and others consisting of mainly individualistic oriented and motivated persons that are performing high. Therefore the matching factor of the members altogether is one central precondition for cooperation.

2. Task:
   A second one is the task that they have to perform: Is this task suitable to be performed by cooperation at all? Tasks of only little technical interdependence and uncertainty e.g. are not really the setting where cooperation is necessary to succeed. As cooperation is a comprehensive system of social, organisational and technical subsets, it may be too complex for the class of task described above – it would be overburdened from an efficiency point of view.

3. Authority:
   The third condition for successful cooperation is the scope the group has to work cooperatively with on the task. Do they have the authority (e.g. scope of action, scope of decision, material resources and responsibilities) and autonomy (e.g. self-organisation, resource allocation, and interface competence) to really cooperate as a part of the organisation?

Potential flaws of cooperation

Human beings trying to cooperate are at risk of suffering from group effects if care is not taken. So cooperation in organisations tends to show some phenomena which are not to be expected by looking at the members individually. They result from the specific situation of interdependency and direct interaction and

are to be understood if an organisation wants to implement a team structure. Some of the most important ones are:

1. Social facilitation: influence of the presence of other people on individual performance.

2. Social loafing: loss of productivity by a loss of individual accountability in group settings.

3. De-individuation: behaviour modification resulting from total identification with the group.

4. Decision making phenomena: loss and gain of decision quality by group processes and enhancement of capacities.

These and other factors are influencing team performance and have to be looked into when implementing and running teams.

For the comprehensive depiction of cooperation in organisational context and the building of high performing teams see Study Text 4.1 "Team Building and Cooperation".

2.8 Mutual action: The goal of cooperation

The issue of cooperation is at the centre of another study text. Therefore we will only briefly discuss it here and look at its relationship to communication. Obviously cooperation is generally largely based on communication. Usually cooperation follows plans and aims upon which a group has to agree and communication is a means of creating this agreement. However, it doesn't always need to be explicit and verbal.

Example

Imagine a group of children exploring an interesting place in the neighbourhood. The group starts to go to the place, carefully looks around for possible hazards, then splits up to further explore the place. One of them might call the others to show them an interesting place or object etc.
It could be that this behaviour is the result of an explicit decision within the group to go to the place and find out more about it. But it could as well be the case that this activity rather emerged out of the mutual game, which accidentally led the group to this particular place where they started to explore it out of curiosity. In both cases the more or less coordinated action of the group gives an impression of cooperation, while in the former it is solely a result of explicit communication.

The example is meant to show that explicit verbal communication is not a necessary condition for cooperation. On the other hand, of course, we find

communication in both parts of the presented situation. Even if the children don't talk about the idea of exploring a certain place, we may regard the action of one of them pointing to this place (or just going to it) as a communicative act to animate or even request the others to follow. So we *can* say that communication lies at the heart of cooperation, but yet have to admit that sometimes this communication may be quite difficult to see.

While the study text on cooperation gives a deeper insight into this, we may simply compare in this case, the goals of the two. We saw that communication aims at a mutual understanding (of an idea, a plan, a mission, ...) and we can now add (as the heading already stated) that cooperation aims at mutual action. Mutual action means that a group of people acts with respect to a goal all of them share. The actions themselves might be different (e.g. preparing different articles for a school journal) or parallel (e.g. pulling a car out of a ditch). Usually the negotiation of the goal happens in terms of communication. However the two parts are sometimes not easy to separate but are intertwined. Cooperation could therefore require further communication to adjust the aims or to react on experience made with a plan in practice. Furthermore communication could also be regarded as a special type of cooperation (as it is mutual discussion – action – to reach a certain goal – understanding).

Cooperation and communication techniques

Therefore techniques of communication and cooperation are not always easy to distinguish and fortunately it is not necessary to draw a sharp line between them. But it should be mentioned that when you are looking at the different methods in chapter 4, that they are usually more related to cooperation *or* to communication, though they mostly serve both purposes to a certain extent.

2.9 The moderator's role

There is a lot of talk about the role, a moderator has in discussions. On the one hand, moderation means taking over responsibility for a process of developing ideas, come up with an agreement etc., on the other it is often emphasised that the moderator – in contrast to a guide – has no mandate to directly rule the process (e.g. by making a decision in a controversial situation. This situation may put one into a dilemma: To further a fruitful process of discussion and decision making, one has to refrain from interventions, which directly lead to a certain result. However, if this result eventually does not come up with the regular discussion, the moderator is usually blamed for not having guided the process strongly enough.

Moderator's dilemma

As is the case with any real dilemma, you cannot completely overcome this situation without raising other problems. A strong leadership would rather reliably lead to results but these results would not be obtained from a collective process of communication and may therefore lack the influence of important expertise of the people involved. Furthermore they would not so easily take account of the decisions made, as they must have the feeling of not being asked to influence the nature of the measures to be taken. The results would be

regarded as a directive and any means of avoiding an implement of these results could be expected if the vital interests of the people involved are affected (see module one for a more concise treatment of this issue). A reluctant moderation on the other hand might lead to endless discussions without sustainable results. Furthermore, a laissez-faire style of moderation might result in a situation where "stronger" participants dominate the others and the latter again would not take over responsibility for the results since they would not have the feeling of having contributed towards them.

To deal with this dilemma, it is necessary to focus on three important issues and tasks:

- As we saw, there will always be leftovers of hierarchy and non-factual influences in a discussion. Instead of aiming at completely eliminating them, we should concentrate on minimising them and trying to prevent them from undermining the results.

- Moderation means to take over responsibility for a process rather than for a result. If a group turns out not to agree with a desirable idea, a moderator may suggest ways to deal with it from another point of view so as to raise the group's *ability to agree*. But he must not urge them into just following the idea. Furthermore he must prevent members of the group from doing so to the others.

- Though moderation seems to be a rather reluctant process, it requires the whole presence and mental activity of the moderator. There is not only the need to know a variety of tools and techniques for conducting a discussion, but also the ability to capture and analyse social situations and to interpret them. Besides other competences, this requires a self-knowledge. The latter is achieved not only by implementing strategies of moderation and communication, but also by implementing those of continuous learning of one's own role in such processes.

The following sections on communication and cooperation will try to reflect on this issue. Therefore you will find that there are not only particular methods of moderating a discussion (like "brainstorming with cards"), but also methods that aim at self reflection (like "diary") as well as getting to know each other better (like "JoHaRi Window") and improve mutual trust and respect.

Activity 10:

Explain again, what the "moderator's dilemma" means.

3 On Techniques of Communication and Co-operation

3.1 Recipes, user manuals or incitations

Recipes for complex tasks

"Teaching is a complex task. And exactly for that reason we need recipes. Simple tasks can be solved without recipes" (Grell, Grell 2007: 48). When Jochen and Monika Grell, two German teachers and authors in school pedagogy originally made this statement in 1979, it was meant as a provocation – and it served this purpose well. When we think of education, we usually think of complex and intertwining processes. From educational science in general and the debates on constructivism and systems theory in particular, we have learned that such self-related complex systems cannot be controlled the way we would handle simple machines. There is no step-by-step plan on how to conduct good education, the teacher is rather expected to react according to the very situation instead of unimaginatively following a set of rules. However, at first sight, Grell and Grell suggest the opposite – to use recipes – and they furthermore argued that this is necessary due to the very fact that there is no linear mechanism of cause and effect in education. In the following section we will take a look at this recipe perspective and its relationship to communication.

Routines

Dealing with easy tasks usually requires nothing more than routines and common patterns of action. We don't need any further thinking or planning to open a door or to welcome our neighbour when they visit. Complex situations on the other hand are characterised by the very fact that they are too difficult to be dealt with using simple programmes, strategies etc. This seems to contradict the idea of using recipes. They require attention, empathy, "withitness" (Zuris 2008, see also Kounin 1977) etc. Any strategy that is to be applied in such situations has to be carefully adapted and may still require changes to make them appropriate. On the other hand we would not recommend that anybody enters complex situations without any strategy. Instead s/he should be prepared with some general rules about what to do in certain typical situations which may be expectable. Furthermore there should be some ideas about what to do if things turn out to be different from what is expected. The reason for this recommendation is quite simple: A new and complex situation requires substantial attention of the player, s/he should not be distracted by any task that could be solved with routines. Furthermore s/he should be at least prepared for those things which are expectable – there will be enough surprises, anyway. This is exactly what recipes may give to the advanced teacher, moderator etc. They offer a kind of framework of action, wherein one could make individual decisions without having to bother about other tasks, which could be done by routines. You could compare this situation with a cook preparing a meal. S/he could use a recipe as a rough guide, while still open to variations with respect to the disposable ingredients, the preferences of the guests etc. For an experienced cook it would even be possible to switch from one recipe to another even though

some items of one recipe have already been prepared, if the conditions make this necessary.

Recipes for novices

For a novice the recipe has a slightly different function (it was particularly to novices, that Grell and Grell addressed their book). Novices do not have a command of a variety of strategies and variations to deal with difficult situations. They need a program that enables them to simply deal with the situation. Novices who take over responsibility for a task usually search for structural guidelines to enable them fulfil the task. They prefer to comply with the guidelines than to aim at virtuosity. Accordingly a recipe provides them with a feasible way of dealing with the situation while an experienced protagonist would probably find ways, which are more suitable for the situation at hand. While the expert would use the recipe as an inspiration, which can be changed on the spot, the novice would rather use it to be prepared, for reflection or to systematically gather experience with new strategies and methods.

These considerations may similarly be applied to the methods and tools presented in the following chapter. Some of them have a lot in common with recipes. They provide a strategy for solving a certain task in the field of cooperation or communication, however this does not usually ensure that the task can be solved in that way. We may once more compare them with a kitchen recipe: It certainly makes a satisfying result more probable. Yet it relies on good ingredients, a fundamental ability to cook, guests with the necessary appetite etc. So especially when you use new and/or unfamiliar methods, you may not immediately register, if they are satisfying your need, thus it is necessary to also reflect on their advantages and disadvantages according to the particular case of use. Furthermore it is recommended that the same is applied to methods, which were not satisfying within a certain situation since this makes it easier for one to decide to apply them again in different situations or to exclude them totally from one's repertoire, if necessary. In section 4.13 a short evaluation list for methods is provided and we suggest that it is used from time to time to reflect on your methodical practise with respect to moderation and the design of communication and cooperation processes.

3.2 Risks and side effects

In 1962 the German pedagogue Eduard Spranger stated the "law of unintended side-effects" (Spranger 1962) and, thus, rejected any old educational pattern of linear intervention. According to Koslowski (2000: 125), the "law" says that

> *every theory of education and pedagogy that is directed only toward the primary effect of the practice of educational action and towards the goal at the end of the educational process of having taught the student one and only one well-defined skill, misses the point of the genuine process of education. It consists not only in the primary effect, but also in considering the side effects of the process of education on the other person. It is necessary to observe what the student*

does with the education, and how he or she creatively uses it and changes it for himself or herself.

For our topic Spranger's law applies in several ways: Firstly, obviously, as a reader of this study text you are probably working in an educational institution. Therefore you might have experienced that teaching and education have side-effects which are not always intended (but which need not always be negative). Secondly as an author of a study text one has to acknowledge that there is no guarantee that one will be understood the way one intends. Of course this is in accordance with the theories of communication mentioned above. But, furthermore, it is a particular issue when dealing with recipes, recommendations etc. Of course one would not expect the reader to take over any recommendation without criticism or reflection, however it is a common experience that people might adopt a suggestion which sounds convincing in theory, while it might have a lot of pitfalls in practice. The third reason is that the application of the methods described below will itself certainly lead to side-effects. Deciding to switch to metacommunication does not only change the topic of a discussion but may also be regarded as a signal (e.g. people may think that something is wrong, that the moderator is aiming at something particular etc.).

Dealing with side-effects

Unfortunately there is no technique that helps to reliably avoid these side-effects. On the other hand the danger is sometimes overestimated. The risk of side-effects lies in overseeing that they might occur at all, than in just not knowing what particular effect(s) may occur. As long as we know they exist, we can carefully watch out for them, and if they materialize, we can then eventually change to another method. It is only when we believe that there will be no side effects at all, are we in danger of overseeing them or relating them to something different.

The term side effect is derived from the medical field, where it usually relates to more or less dangerous side effects of drugs and therapies. And as any responsible doctor would advise his or her patient to be careful in applying a method or a drug and watch out if side effects occur, which were not expected, as authors we would like to give this same advice. Professionalism in education is not expressed by avoiding any side effects (which is impossible), but in being attentive to their occurrence and being flexible enough to deal with them.

Activity 11:

Briefly recall the role guidelines play for novices in fields of social action.

3.3 Methods and Techniques of communication

As the next section of this study text is intended to present particular techniques and methods of cooperation and communication, it is now necessary to provide some order for them. There is a vast variety of methods and furthermore there

are also lots of variations for most of them. According to our thoughts on recipes it is not surprising that some of the methods can be used in a variety of completely different situations and even though a method is intended to serve a certain purpose, you will sooner or later find somebody who can report having used it successfully in a different context. However, there are some categories, which may provide at least a first order to the methods of cooperation and communication. Such an order can partly be derived from the theories of communication as discussed above. From the four-ears-model we learned that communication may deal with the content, but at the same time addresses other interpersonal aspects (appeal, self-revelation, relationship). Since these aspects could superimpose the actual content-related discussion, they are at the focus of accompanying methods of communication. Either the individual reflects on his/her own communications with respect to the question, how s/he may improve his/her ways of communication to constructively deal with them or a moderator uses techniques to reach a stage of metacommunication, which makes it possible to clarify problems on that levels. Therefore one criterion for ordering methods of communication and cooperation is its relationship to the meta-level. It may aim at a mutual forming of opinion or it may address the meta-level – either in the form of reflection or in the form of meta-communication. Figure 3.1 shows this as a continuum.

Categories to order methods and tools

Reflection and/or metacommunication

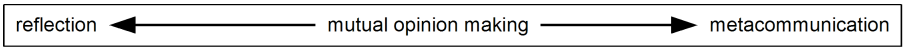

Figure 3.1: *Continuum from reflection to metacommunication*

Individuals and/or groups

This categorisation already leads us to the fact that some of the methods are rather related to the preparation of communication or accompany it while others are related to the core communication process. From this perspective it is obvious that they are not always intended to be used with the same group size. For example some methods of reflection address the individual, while some methods of forming opinion require the whole group of participants. However, most of the methods can be used with respect to different group sizes. The second continuum (Figure 3.2) reflects this as follows:

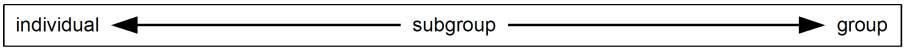

Figure 3.2: *Continuum from individual to group*

Both continua together form an orientation matrix, which can be applied to the different methods. Although they may have different "broad" areas of application, they can be related to a certain spot in the matrix, from which they can spread to a larger or lesser extent to other areas. The flash-light (see section 4.4) for example cannot be used for individuals and is not very useful in small groups. So its feasibility with respect to the second continuum is on the right hand side (or at the bottom in Figure 3.3). Furthermore it is quite typical as an introduction to metacommunication and therefore located on the left hand side. But, as it may also be used to provide new perspectives on the topic, a discussion, in dealing with it, it spreads to the middle of the matrix. Similarly the other methods are placed within the figure.

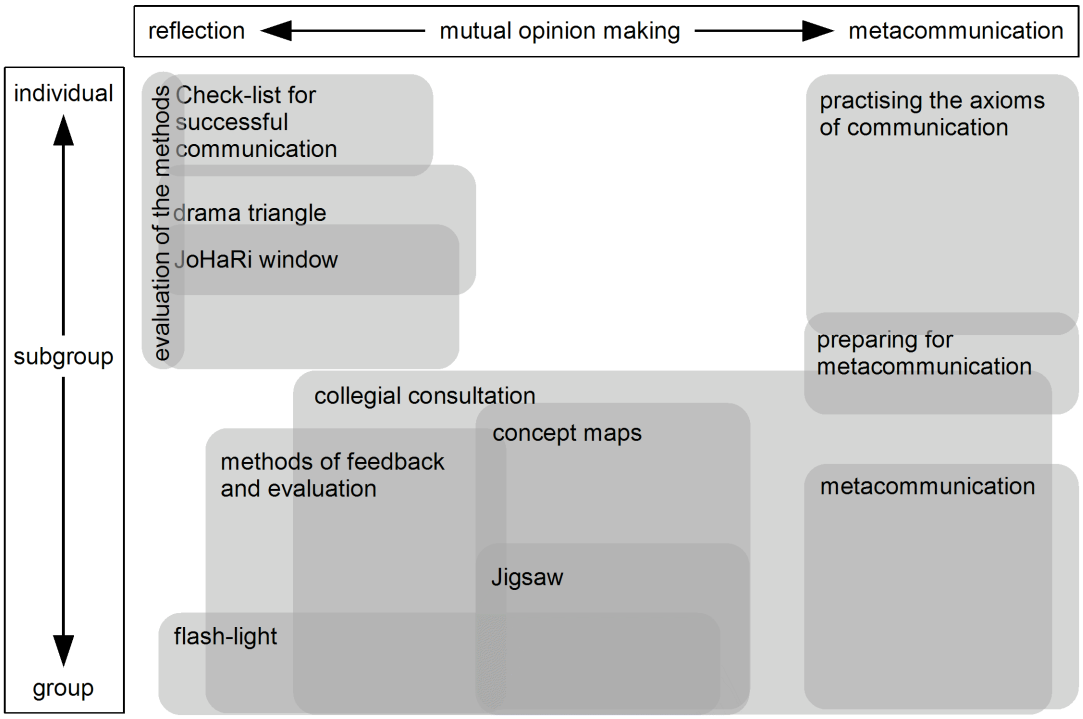

Figure 3.3: *A matrix of methods and tools of communication and cooperation*

Activity 12:

Think of your own repertoire of actions to deal with cooperation and communication tasks and try to place some of them within the matrix.

4 Techniques and tools of cooperation and communication – a collection

4.1 Checklist for successful communication

At a glance: The following checklist (cf. Figure 4.1) points to some of the most common causes of misunderstanding. To create a good background for communication, it is not always necessary to fulfil all the points mentioned here. But deviations deserve special attention and could often give cause for sequences of meta-cognition.

When and where is it useful? You may use the checklist as well to prepare a meeting so as to reflect the reasons, why some things may have worked well, while others have not been successful. It may sometimes be worth considering using it in a group to prepare metacommunication, but generally it is rather addressed to the individual.

Variations: Sometimes not all the demands listed in the checklist can be fulfilled consequently. You may therefore also apply it by giving scale answers to each issue (e.g. from 5: "fulfilled completely" to 1: "very poorly fulfilled"). If you provide a sequence of communication situations you may repeatedly apply this list to monitor if the situation is improving. You may also apply the list after a meeting (conducted by you or somebody else) and if some things went wrong, this may give you clues on the reasons.

Is everybody physically able to understand each other?

☐ Can everybody hear everybody else sufficiently?

☐ Is there any disturbing noise or are there other distractions preventing one or more of the participants from paying attention?

☐ Can everybody see everybody else (since body language is of great importance)?

☐ If things are written down – can everybody see and read them appropriately?

☐ Are any participants hindered by specific physical conditions (diseases, disabilities, headache etc.)? Is it possible to take care of it?

Is it to be expected that everybody will be able to understand everybody else with respect to language and meaning?

☐ Do all participants use the same language? If not, does everybody understand the different languages sufficiently?

☐ Is the language used mother tongue to all of the participants? If not, does everybody try to avoid the use of special idioms, too complex sentences, unfamiliar words etc.?

☐ Do the participants relate to the same body of technical terms (e.g. pedagogical vocabulary); if not, is there some translation, regular clarification of the terms in use?

☐ Do the participants relate to the same general concepts? If not, is this issue addressed explicitly?

Is it to be expected that the participants aim at mutual understanding?

☐ Are there any conflicts (individual, department, family etc.) amongst the participants, which may prevent mutual understanding?

☐ Is the situation designed as a win-win-situation, i.e. would every participant profit or at least not lose something if mutual understanding is reached?

☐ Does everybody feel accountable to contribute to mutual understanding?

☐ Are there any (maybe different) time constraints for the participants?

Other important issues (you may add your own questions and observations here)

_____
_____
_____

Figure 4.1: *Checklist*

4.2 Preparing Metacommunication

(*Source: Redlich, Richter 1992*)

At a glance: Metacommunication, which will be introduced from a methodological point of view in the next section, has some premises on the participant's side. Therefore it is useful to prepare for metacommunication by individually exploring one's own weaknesses, strengths and general characteristics of communication. The following Figure 4.2 is a questionnaire which will help you find out more about these characteristics.

Clarify which qualifications you possess and which ones you are lacking. What are you good at, at the moment and what skills can you develop further? Fill in the questionnaire and include skills you consider important (irrespective of whether you possess or lack them). Each item is rated from 1 (poor) to 6 (excellent).

I have a general knowledge of methods for solving problems and when to use them appropriately.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I possess practical skills for solving problems.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I know of methods of diagnosis and how to apply them.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to accept discussion partners without any reservation.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I have the ability to ask for concrete information without appearing inquisitive.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to express my opinion on an issue.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to express my ideas on an issue.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to conduct a discussion without dominating my discussion partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to create / contribute to a relaxed discussion atmosphere.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to encourage others in a discussion.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to put myself in someone else's position.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to convince others of my ideas.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am conversant with the psychological conditions of communication.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to support colleagues and staff members with respect to emotion.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to lead discussions such that concrete agreements are reached.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to accept criticism from others.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to change my opinion during a discussion.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am able to admit mistakes.

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Your own addition

1 2 3 4 5 6
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Figure 4.2: *Questionnaire for exploring one's own communication*

When and where is it useful? "It is never too late to learn" was the subtitle of a document on adult learning by the European Commission (2006). We could also apply this statement to the issue of learning about oneself – and in our context about one self's styles and peculiarities of communicating. We hardly find situations in which it is actually not useful to practise some methods to increase self-awareness, like the one suggested above. Yet, in some situations it might also be useful to request participants of a continuing discussion group to use this tool to prepare concrete steps of metacommunication.

Variations: Of course there are lots of possibilities to modify the questionnaire, especially with respect to particular demands of a communication situation. You may e.g. relate questions directly to aspects of the four-level-model ("I am able to decode emotional messages appropriately") or to aspects of cooperation ("I am happy if someone makes a suitable suggestion even if I myself would have wanted to suggest the same thing") etc. One may also use the idea of the questionnaire to enter metacommunication in that you ask – instead of offering it – the participants to compile the questions which would be appropriate for a questionnaire on communication.

Besides, the questionnaire can be a rather playful tool to put together different groups (with respect to their answer in different areas of the questionnaire). However it must be said that the questionnaire is not an appropriate instrument for a more concise diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses in communication.

4.3 Metacommunication

(Source: Leeds-Hurwitz 1989; Meidinger 2000)

In chapter 2.6 we already gave an overview of the concept of metacommunication. A discussion served as an example, in which the moderator proposed that the focus of discussion be changed and asked if the others agreed with this observation. The proposal for metacommunication addressed the content level of communication. But quite often it is uncertain, which level of communication hinders the a mutual understanding, it may often be appropriate to be very reluctant with a diagnosis (like the two above) and instead make a more open proposal like "It seems to me that we are not successful in dealing with the problem we decided to address. Do you agree?" Instead of offering a collection of "useful sentences for metacommunication" (which in fact very rarely would turn out useful as long as they are not authentic expressions of the moderator), the following list could give some hints on other tools of communication, which might be useful for starting or maintaining a process of metacommunication.

At a glance:

- The flash light (see section 4.4) is generally a useful low-threshold method for starting metacommunication. By using different starting questions, one could channel the outcome into different directions. However, it is generally recommended that the question be rather kept open since usually a moderator cannot be too sure of the importance of possible issues.

- The Johari window (see section 4.9) can be used within metacommunication to deal with the aspects of self perception and social perception. If it is used solely, without directly relating it to metacommunication in advance, it may turn out as a starting point for metacommunication.

- The drama triangle (see section 4.6) is actually partly introduced as a method to structure metacommunication, so the relationship is quite close. Applying the drama triangle usually requires a good basis of mutual trust within the group so it is rather useful as a method of further investigation on (meta)communication than as a starting point.

- Practising the axioms of communication (see section 4.7) could serve as a starting point. Often groups regard the axioms as quite interesting so they could be used to open a discussion on communication in general which eventually might be related to the particular group's issues.

- Collegial consultation (see section 4.10) may serve as a method for dealing with issues on communication, however, it cannot be easily used to solve metacommunicative tasks within the same group since through the setting of roles within this method, the participants are involved on the one hand, and so can't authentically apply themselves on the other hand. However, in some cases the results of collegial consultation may also be transferred to the group which conducted it to reflect on its own communication.

When and where is it useful? As it was said above, metacommunication is a powerful but at the same time risky intervention in communication. It is often quite easy to start a process of metacommunication, however it may sometimes become very difficult to get on with the results. Generally, metacommunication is advisable once you are sure that the side effects of communication apply to its main goals. This could occur in any situation, from small talk in a group through a staff meeting to a conference. The way to implement metacommunication, though, depends basically on the relationship the group members to each other and to you. A serious discussion on potential conflicts within a group requires a very stable social climate; a discussion on the way to deal with different opinions in a culturally mixed group should be started quite carefully as often individuals are not at all aware that their culturally shaped way of dealing with different opinions might be different from that of others.

Example: A mixed group of students and teachers discuss some proposals for a school's mission statement. The discussion repeatedly stops when the teachers criticise a certain aspect of it, while other parts are discussed without disruption. In this case the problem itself could carefully be addressed by the moderator (e.g. "Am I right in the perception that the issue of ... is rather tricky to be discussed in this circle?"). A guided discussion may lead to a reason for that (e.g. that this part is highly based on the student's contribution and they therefore tend to defend it. If the group disagrees with the moderator's proposal to discuss this issue at a later time, it might be useful to apply a flash light to see if there are more general hindrances for the flow of the discussion.

Variations: Since the suggestions above only relate to particular methods (with their own variations), there is not much to be discussed here on variation possibility. In spite of this, having already dealt with the risks of metacommunication, one should always ask if there are alternatives. We already discussed that some conflicts could arise which cannot be eliminated through metacommunication.

Sometimes it could also be sufficient to have a break and leave some space for individuals to talk about certain issues or just to relax and then find it easier to come up with a new perspective. Again in some cases, it would rather be helpful to implement methods to increase mutual trust in a general way.

4.4 Flash light

(Alternative names and names of similar techniques: check in; snapshot; ice breaker; lightning round; Source: Szepanski 2006)

The flash light is quite a common method in adult education. Though the method itself is very simple, it can be useful in a broad variety of communication situations.

At a glance: A flash light means that all participants of a discussion (a seminar, a learning group, ...) are requested to say their personal opinion regarding one particular issue. The moderator raises a question and the participants give their answer one after the other. The only rules are:

- stick to the question and try to answer briefly
- don't comment on the answers of the others
- stick to the sequence

Executed in this elementary form, the method usually doesn't require more than a few minutes – after which the communication situation could change completely.

When and where is it useful? Generally, a flash light means an interruption of a communication process. Instead of discussing, answering and responding, each of the persons involved utters their personal opinion on a question. Recalling the ideas of the systemic approach, we can see that this could be a way of bringing new information into the system. Firstly, the method ensures that *everybody* contributes his point of view. This gives an overview not only to the moderator, but also to all the others. Secondly, the rule of not commenting on the other person's statements is a way of preventing situations of reproach and defence. Nobody has to justify his position (and by that, the statements are really regarded as individual opinions rather than attempts to convey the meaning of a group of people). Thirdly, the communication is focussed on one particular issue. This may generally help to clarify situations, in which too many issues are raised simultaneously.

The flash light can be used either in contentious communication or in neutral situations (like the evaluation of a learning sequence, the start of a discussion on a new topic etc. Typical starting questions could have the form of: "Could you please share with us your personal opinion regarding the issue of ...", "What do you personally think of the idea of ...?", "what is your personal feeling when you hear ...?" etc.

Example: A discussion panel spent a lot of time on a particular detail of the overall question. It seems that some of the participants regarded this aspect as being crucial for the whole issue, while others rather had the feeling that it was a waste of time. One participant expressed this opinion: "This discussion is complete nonsense. We're only dealing with details and we have completely lost sight of the main issue!"

Of course this could lead to a conflict since the participant reproaches the others for wasting time. However, as a moderator, we should not be too quick in judging, if s/he is wrong or not. Instead, a flash light could serve as a method of metacommunication to find out if the group actually tends to regard the detail as crucial or if e.g. it is being dealt with to avoid more general (and more difficult) questions. A starting point could be as follows: "... has the feeling of losing precious time with this discussion, while others might regard it as important enough for a bit more time to be spent on it. Could you please briefly state your opinion on the importance of the issue, we are discussing at the moment?"

The answers may deliver an overview about the different positions within the group. If there is rather a consensus, one could easily proceed either with giving a short conclusion and going back to the main issue or with further discussion on the detail – according to the group's opinion. If the group's position is less definite, different methods of moderation could be used, e.g. dividing the group into two or more sub-groups dealing with different issues, decide to continue the discussion of the detail but setting a time limit for that or postponing it to a particular time.

Variations: There are lots of variations of this method with respect to the context, the group, the aim etc. A number of examples shall give an impression of the variability of the flash light.

Sometimes it is difficult for the participants to keep the sequence of the statements and to stick to the rule of not interrupting each other and commenting on others' positions. If one purpose of the flash light is to overcome such situations, you may use a symbolic object (e.g. a stone, a ruler etc.) to indicate who's turn it is to say something.

On some occasions there is a tendency to give stereotype answers. For example in a feedback on a seminar, the participants may tend to say things like "the seminar was fine, the discussions were also fine, ...". It may loosen up the situation (and lead to more differentiated feedback), and "prevent" the use of some of those words that are major pointers to stereotype answers (like "good", "fine", "well",...).

If – as is usually the case – time constraint is an issue of discussion, the metacommunication itself should not be too time consuming. In this case it could be helpful to limit the time for each contribution (e.g. half a minute).

Activity 13:

The flash light is a very general method and therefore there are a lot more possible variations. You may think of certain situations and create somesome yourself.

4.5 Concept Maps

(Alternative names and names of similar techniques: MindmapTM; Source: Buzan 1996)

Regarding mutual concepts as an aim of communication, we will find the organisation of ideas at the core of the process. While achieving a mutual understanding with respect to aspects like the different levels of a message (see section 2.2), the content-related side of the process is to clarify what ideas are occurring, how they are related to each other, and finally, how they can be dealt with. There are several tools and techniques for accomplishing this process. One of them is concept mapping. A similar term, e.g. MindmapTM is a registered brand name (Buzan 1996), therefore we will use the former term.

Concept maps are a blend of a brainstorming and a method of structuring. A traditional brainstorming may lead to a variety of ideas which are merely associated with each other. It may contain a lot of useful information regarding a particular task, however this information could be difficult to grasp if the ideas are presented in a different form and without any order. Structuring methods, on the other hand, tend to focus on the relations between different concepts. Therefore the individuals might feel the need to only propose ideas that fit into a given structure – which is a hindrance to creativity. The general aim of concept maps is to simultaneously collect and organise ideas. This can be done individually as well as in a group.

At a glance: Simply start by writing down the core question, concept, notion or something similar at the middle of a blank sheet of paper. Now, as you associate a certain idea (e.g. a constraint, a part of a solution, an important characteristic etc.), you write it down briefly and connect it with the central term. Now other ideas will occur which are also written down and connected to either the central terms or other terms which have already been written down. Eventually the result is a structured collection of important aspects of the overall topic. A sample picture is given in Figure 4.3. It deliberately doesn't look too nice – trying to obtain a nice visual design while drawing a concept map could easily distract the attention from the content it is related to. Though concept maps are sometimes also used as a means of presentation, in our case, they are rather a "private" tool for collecting and organising thoughts. However, concept maps can also be produced in (small) groups. In this case several people draw the same concept map. Thereafter different groups may exchange the results to gather more ideas or discuss the results among each other, maybe to eventually come up with one picture fitting for all.

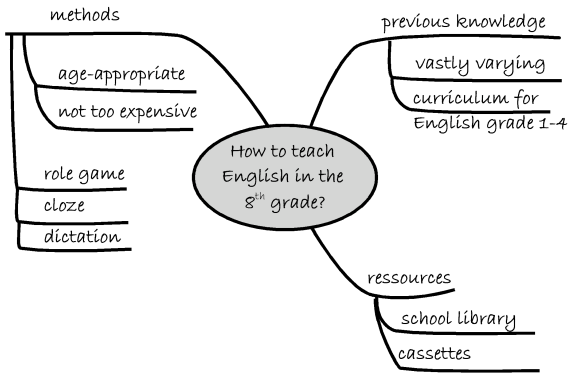

Figure 4.3: *A sketch of concept map*

When and where is it useful? The strength of concept maps lies in the possibility of rapidly collecting ideas with it and putting them at the same time into a form which is easily accessible for the creator (and for others, too). Therefore concept maps can be used in most situations in which it is regarded useful to collect ideas without applying a certain structure in advance for them.

Example: Imagine that your task is to prepare a small conference. Obviously there are a lot of things to do and keep in mind. Creating a concept map could be a good starting point to draw up an overview of the things that have to be done. Since they are immediately organised under the appropriate criteria (e.g. urgent things / things that still have time), you will then obtain an overview of the whole task. In this case, you could also decide to keep the concept map at a place where you can easily add things which come to your mind (and strike out things that are already done). Of course this method would not be appropriate for organising a big conference with two hundred participants as in this case it would be necessary to use more complicated methods of planning. Nevertheless even in this case a concept map could be used as the starting point to obtain a first overview.

Variations: There is a huge range of variations in applying concept maps, so only some suggestions can be given here as examples. You can individually use concept maps to organise ideas on virtually any subject (preparing a lesson or a meeting, planning a move, etc.). A group can create a concept map together, but it can also be prepared by subgroups or individuals, who prepare a concept map for parts of the whole task. Concept maps can serve as a basis for the discussion of issues in plenary sessions or in small working groups etc.

4.6 The Drama Triangle

(Source: http://ta-tutor.com/tatutor/drama-triangle;Karpman1968)

The Drama triangle is rather a tool for analysing situations of communication in general and conflicts in particular. It stems from the concept of “transactional analysis” (Berne 1996), which is still quite popular in educational practice (cf.

Reece, Walker 2003). Hence it will also be presented within the theoretical considerations of this study text. However, from a contemporary point of view, the value of the model lies less in its theoretical insight than in its practical use for quickly analysing situations of communication (and their development) and sometimes moreover in giving metacommunication in these situations a more vivid turn.

At a glance: A communicative situation turns out to be dramatic. There are attacks and counter attacks, alliances, victims and grief. The terms used here to depict such a situation are as less appropriate as the actions itself could be in such a situation. Instead of factually discussing an issue the participants stick to personal quarrels. In this situation, first of all it should be helpful for a moderator (and a participant, or either of them) to get an overview of the roles that are involved. Karpman (1968) suggests a simple model, related to the *roles* in a classic drama: There is always *a persecutor*, *a rescuer* and *a victim*. As each of the roles is related to the other two, they can be ordered in a triangle (see Figure 4.4).

In the example below we'll see how the roles are filled (and how they could change).

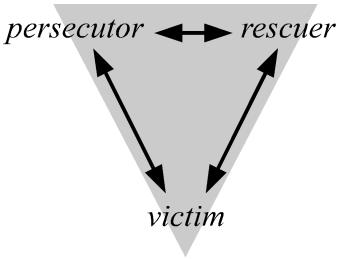

Figure 4.4: *The drama triangle*

When and where is it useful: In any communication situation, if conflicts arise, it may be helpful to analyse, what is going on and what is likely to happen next. Therefore you might think about the distribution of roles in the situation as if it were simply a "game, people play" (Berne 1996). With that, you could obtain a clearer perspective of the situation, an idea of possible paths of development and even a new direction of intervention – by simply explaining that the situation seems to you as if A is prosecuting B and C is trying to rescue B etc. and that this doesn't seem to contribute much to the original task the group was dealing with.

Example: Imagine a number of teachers doing a workshop to further develop the profile of your school. As the moderator you agreed with them to do a creative analysis of the strength and weaknesses of the institution by collaboratively drawing pictures on them. Suddenly one of the participants stands up and the following is an excerpt of a possible dialogue. The right column of the table shows the distribution of the roles, which changes several times within the short sequence. In the sequence shown in Table 4.1, the person complaining is named C, the moderator M and another participant intervening is called O.

C: "It's boring and useless to draw all these pictures. How long is this going to go on? M, Do you mind if we just get on with developing the profile?	Prosecutor (P): C Victim (V): M Rescuer (R): ?
O: "What's all this fuss about? M. had a great idea and it surely will help *most of us* to come up with good ideas for the profile."	R: O C starts to slip into the role of the Victim
C: "Sorry, I didn't mean it that way. I just wish that *all of us* can benefit from what we are doing."	P: O V: C R: ?
M: "Calm down. I think, C just raised a question we could discuss. We shouldn't all become angry about that."	P: O V: C R: M
...	

Table 4.1: *Roles in communication*

The short sequence shows the dynamics of the situation which is reflected in the continuous change of roles. One could easily imagine that in the next step the other participant (as the former rescuer) is forced into the role of the victim.

Further remarks: Transactional analysis and the drama triangle are comprehensive approaches for describing and analysing human action. It is not possible to describe all the facets of those concepts on limited space; yet I consider the model useful for a quick and helpful means of analysis. Some additional remarks could give an idea of further opportunities related to the concept. The relationships between the different roles are linked to particular presumptions about the other person. The persecutor, for example, must regard the victim as being wrong in his opinion. In this situation the rescuer is hardly able to intervene without taking sides with the victim (and therefore against the persecutor). Situations like this will contribute little to solving factual tasks because they deal with relationships rather than with issues. Therefore the perspective of the drama triangle reveals that it is necessary not to change the roles but to change the "game" to return to the primary tasks. There are several ways of doing this. One way, as mentioned, could be to introduce this perspective itself, but many of the other tools described here could also serve this purpose (e.g. the flash light).

Variations: There are no particular variations of the method itself, as it is rather an analytical approach. On the other hand, there is a variety of possibilities for dealing with the results of this analysis (like sharing them with others, using them to plan an intervention etc.). A different use of the concept

might be to deal with it outside of any concrete contentious situation to prepare the participants for them to occur, e.g. in a section on communication training.

4.7 Practising the axioms of communication

(Source: Watzlawick et al. 1967; Coates 2009; Meidinger 2000)

Above we dealt with one of the axioms of communication as formulated by Watzlawick et al. (see section 2.2). We already mentioned that there are five of them altogether and each of them might contribute to successful communication. In the following paragraphs, the axioms will be briefly described. To capture their actual meaning it may be useful to play with them rather than just reading them. Therefore, following the descriptions, a set of role games is given (cf. Meidinger 2000), with which you can practise your understanding of the axioms and their significance in analysing and configuring communication.

1. Axiom: "One cannot not communicate" This axiom can be demonstrated with a short thought experiment. Imagine a usually active member of the teacher's body trying not to communicate in a conference. He may stay silent, try to keep a low profile etc. Anyway, if he usually contributes to discussions, he'll soon be asked if everything is fine with him. Alternatively he could be asked, if he considers the particular point under discussion unimportant or if he is discontented etc. Whatever we do, will – as soon as it is observed by others – be linked to some meaning.

2. Axiom: "Every communication has a content and relationship aspect" We discussed this axiom thoroughly in section 2.2. Briefly put, it reminds us that any utterance of information also contains some declaration about the relationship between us and the others.

3. Axiom: "The nature of a relationship is dependent on the punctuation of the partners' communication procedures" Communication itself has no beginning and no end, as we saw above. Therefore any participant has to decide on a starting point and certain breaks within it to give it a meaning. Of course different participants may have different opinions on that. Especially the rather vague contributions to a discussion may be related to different states of it, regarding the punctuation. Metacommunication could turn out to be useful in such cases, to return back to a mutual understanding.

4. Axiom: "Communication can be direct or analogous"[1] According to this axiom each communication can be clear and definite or it can rather have the form of an analogy, a vague hint towards a certain direction etc. At close up, most communication belongs to the latter form though there are also definite aspects. For example, when you point to a certain building ("This is

1 The original version of this axiom uses the terms digital and analogue, but in the present day ubiquitous digital technology they could be a bit misleading.

the beautiful Asmara Cathedral"), the gesture is direct, meaning that there is (nearly) no room for misunderstanding your gesture. Yet, the sentence may be understood differently (e.g. it is meant honestly or ironically). Of course the differentiation of direct and analogous communication is usually a matter of the observer.

5. Axiom: "Communication procedures are either symmetric or hierarchic, depending on the relationship between the partners." The original version of this axiom distinguishes between symmetric and complementary communication to foster the idea of supplementing something. Yet, in most cases the relationship is, if not symmetric, more or less hierarchic. In symmetric communication all participants are equal and are allowed to say similar things. In hierarchic communication one participant usually has a right or the power to dominate the other and may for example be allowed to give orders, while the other has to obey. Schools typically provide a variety of situations in relation to both cases. The communication between teachers and students is usually of the hierarchical type while the communication amongst students may be symmetric (but doesn't always need to be).

At a glance: Dealing with the axioms means reflecting their meaning in communication – and this can probably be done best by experiencing them in concrete situations. The following exercises show possible situations in which they gain particular meaning. Each situation in the following sequence is related to the respective axiom, but of course other axioms could similarly turn out to be important in such situations. You can practise them as role games in a group.

Exercise on Axiom 1
You wish to help a colleague who seems to be sad due to family circumstances. S/he keeps silent and tries to avoid any utterances regarding his situation.

Exercise on Axiom 2
Several complaints were raised about a certain teacher, being to reluctant to punish students for bad performance/behaviour. As a supervisor, you have received these complaints and are talking with this teacher about the issue.

- *Variation 1:* The teacher regards it as unacceptable that you dare to intervene at all since s/he is convinced that his/her teaching method is good. Yet you regard his/her teaching style as being problematic and think that you have to stick to the issue and keep talking with him/her.

- *Variation 2:* The teacher is quite happy that you addressed the issue that students may need more guidance and, in some cases, punishments. Yet he will not tolerate anybody intervening in his own lessons.

Exercise on Axiom 3
You are moderating a discussion on student assessment. Some students are of the opinion that the amount of tests creates pressure and anxiety while some teachers think that nervous students could become frightened in any particular test situation.

Exercise on Axiom 4

- *Variation 1:* A student asks to consult with you on your requirements with respect to your subject. Once you start discussing the issue, he repeatedly mentions difficulties in learning caused by family conditions. However, each time you try to address this issue directly, he turns back to matters relating to your subject.

- *Variation 2:* In a team discussion of teachers, one colleague claims to implement a very democratic teaching style because s/he is always interested in other's opinions. Yet, s/he constantly interrupts the other participants of the discussion.

Exercise on Axiom 5
A teacher speaks with the headmaster on the issue of applying for some financial support for new teaching material. The headmaster considers granting the support, though s/he wants to know more about it. Yet, he doesn't offer the teacher a chair.

- *Variation*: In the ongoing discussion the headmaster becomes friendlier, offers the teacher a chair and something to drink. At the same time s/he changes his mind concerning the teacher's application.

When and where is it useful? Generally, thinking (and speaking) about communication may turn out useful in cases, in which the communication itself turns out dysfunctional or at least not to be successful enough. Obviously, this judgement depends on the scale applied. From intercultural communication, for example, we know that the importance of starting a discussion with general remarks about the participant's feelings and situations are varying. While some western people tend to go straight to the issue, others prefer to spend some time on the other person's circumstances, his/her family etc. Some tend to discuss business issues while having a meal while others prefer to deal with those issues afterwards. Such situations can generally be a reason for misunderstanding and therefore it is of importance to be able to deal with them. Talking about communication is a way of doing so (though this *may* also lead to misunderstandings caused by different attitudes towards what should be discussed in which way, especially according to the cultural background). By practising such communication in a skill training, one learns not only about communication itself (i.e. applies and explores the theories), but also develops skills in sensitively but distinctly talking about communication itself.

Variations: The axioms deal with quite general aspects of communication and so do the given examples in the role game. You may also play these roles or similar situations to examine other aspects of communication theory (e.g. the four-level model). If you are planning to conduct a systematic training of communicative skills (e.g. as a means of intern further education), you might divide a group into those playing the situation and others observing it with respect to particular aspects of communication theory (a certain axiom, a certain level of communication, but also the question of boundaries of the theoretical view with respect to real communication.

The exercises can also be done individually. In this case it is your task to try to imagine the discussion situations described as vividly as possible. Afterwards you can analyse it with respect to the axioms.

4.8 Circular questions

(References: Schlippe, Schweitzer 2003; Brown 1997)

Circular questions are a powerful method for aiding a group to change its views on a certain issue. More precisely, this type of question aims at providing new information for a communicative system. The circular questions stem from the systemic branch of psychotherapy and consultation and are usually described in the respective literature (e.g. Brown 1997; Goldenberg, Goldenberg 2008; Schlippe, Schweitzer 2003). In the following section we will introduce some common types of circular questions.

At a glance:

Questions on exceptions
A common situation is that something is regarded as totally infeasible ("my class is not able to concentrate at all") – a common reaction to this statement would be to seek new solutions for everyone involved. To direct the focus on the resources of a group or organisation instead of on the difficulties, one may ask for exceptions ("has there been a situation in which your class – exceptionally – was able to concentrate for a longer period of time?"). Once an exception is found you may proceed with the following type of question.

Questions on differences
This type asks for differences from the general situation and thereby opens the view (and mind) for opportunities of things that could be developed in a different way than usual. Following the example given above there may be a period of concentration of a class which was observed in a particular learning situation (e.g. a lesson taught outside the school). Asking for the differences may direct the attention to the fact that the students are distracted and/or bored by certain aspects of their usual learning environment. Eventually one may think about ways of changing those conditions instead of complaining about a class that cannot concentrate.

Questions on the sequence
Sometimes moderators (and teachers) are confronted with an overwhelming series of problems ("the classes are too big, lack of good teaching resources, the parents don't care enough, more time is needed,. . ."). Of course it is impossible to deal with such a series of problems at the same time and since they may all be important, the amount of them is discouraging and may prevent one from any action at all. Questions on sequence demands that the questions of importance (or another criterion) be applied to the issue. By that it may turn out that, though all problems are not trivial, some are much more important or

urgent than others. Obviously it would now be useful (and less discouraging) to proceed with number one on the list and postpone the others.

Triadic questions

While all the examples above are referred to as circular questions, there is one type which holds as a kind of paradigm. It is a quite sophisticated way of asking a question, but yet a powerful way for altering perspectives. The central idea is to ask somebody about the answer, somebody else would give to a certain question – a bit like a bank shot in billiard. Imagine for example a teacher who complains about a student he regards lazy. The traditional way would be to ask the teacher if the student is lazy (and of course the teacher would agree). A circular question could be "If I would ask the student ... if s/he is lazy, what would s/he answer?".

When and where is it useful? As mentioned above, circular questions aim at providing further information for a system. Quite often a moderator has a clear idea of what the group should try to do, what are promising perspectives on a problem etc. However, sometimes one fails in just explaining this view – it has to come from the group itself. Circular questions are useful in aiding the group in taking on different perspectives and freely evaluating if they are fruitful or not. With that in mind they may be used at any time within the discussion.

Variations: Obviously the questions may be varied with respect to the particular issue in focus. Furthermore there are other types of circular questions (see references above). Usually, by applying circular questions variations will come up rather automatically.

4.9 Johari Window

(Source: Sutton, Stewart 2002; Meidinger 2000; http://www.noogenesis.com/game_theory/johari/johari_window.html [Aug., 18th 2013])

The Johari Window (named after its inventors Jo Luft and Harry Ingram) is a method for finding out about differences between the self-image and the public-image. Furthermore, it can serve as a basis for increasing mutual trust and respect within a group since the creation of a Johari Window within a group deepens the knowledge, the participants have about each other concerning not only the public role but also aspects of their private life. Therefore it is necessary to have already reached a certain point of mutual trust before working with the method.

At a glance: The core idea of the JoHari Window is that there are different "fields" of our identity, which are characterised by the extent to which they are known to us or others. The "window" places them in a table with four cells, where the columns are describing what I know or do not know about myself, while the rows state, what others know or do not know about me (cf. Figure 4.5):

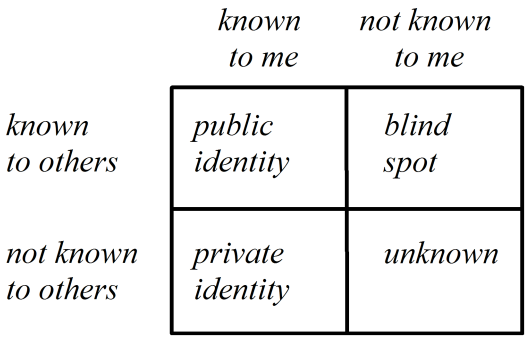

Figure 4.5: *A Johari Window*

There are mainly two ways of dealing with the Johari Window. You can either give a characterisation of yourself by just sketching your idea of the size of the different areas or you can start going into their actual content (usually related to a certain area of interest). We will give two examples of how to deal with the concept either in a group or individually. Both require that you or somebody else has informed the group about the general concept of the Johari Window. Hence before making the two suggestions, we will give some more explanations.

To make use of the Johari Window we have to spend some time on the characteristics of the four quadrants.

The upper left quadrant is sometimes called an "open" area. Anything which is placed here is known to ourselves as well as to others. There is not much room for mistrust or suspicion in this area. Common items of this area in our context are the name, the position, some publicly known interests and preferences etc. This area usually causes the least trouble in communication as it is transparent to all who are involved. Nevertheless some information of the open area could lead to difficulties. Imagine somebody who has betrayed or committed a crime in the past and this is known to the others. As a result, this knowledge may give rise to mistrust and even animosities even if the crime took place long ago. A less dramatic example would be if one participant regards himself – and is regarded as – a doer, it could be difficult to establish an open communication situation as several participants may only wait for this one to take things into his or her hands. Generally, if there are hidden expectations or mistrust towards somebody because of things which seem to be known to everybody, it may become necessary to talk about the issues in the "open area".

The upper right quadrant contains the things, others know about us but which we don't know of. Hence it is sometimes called the "blind spot". Knowledge in this area usually comes from observations of others. For example others may notice, through observation that I tend not to look into my counterpart's eyes, before I do. Or sometimes others notice that I'm about to fall ill before I realise it. This area could be divided further. Though the others know about the aspects in this area, they might often expect that the person they observing also knows about it (which would mean that the aspects are related to the upper left quadrant). Only in rare cases are we really sure that we know something about

somebody, which he or she doesn't know him/herself. Discussing the content in this area can contribute to establishing mutual trust. On the one hand, the risk for the one who is being observed is rather small because the discussion deals only with things, the others already know. On the other hand it could be quite enlightening, since the person being observed could learn something new about his/her identity. But this is obviously also the risky part in this area. The aspects of ourselves we don't see are often not hidden by incidence, but by psychodynamic reasons which are rooted in our personality. Therefore it can be a stressful and even shattering experience to hear others talking about our "blind spot". Hence, as with all other areas, communication on this should be conducted in a tactful manner.

The lower left quadrant is sometimes called the "hidden area" because this is the part of our identity, we know about and at the same time try to hide from others. Of course this particularly depends on who the others are. For example, for our partner or close friends and relatives, many of these things would not be regarded as hidden, compared to colleagues or acquaintances. Obviously dealing with this part in a group cannot mean to arbitrarily reveal issues that belong to this part. While it may be necessary to share some aspects with others when working on the same task, others are doubtlessly private and don't belong into any public context. A hint on the types of issues that belong under the category of the former is to reflect on how the things revealed, would influence my contribution towards a mutual work. Fears, for example, are usually kept rather private among adults – and it would usually play no role in school development if I am afraid of snakes or not. However, others fears (like that of loosing authority) will probably influence my contributions. In a climate of open and trustful discussion it should be possible to express such issues without having to expect that the others will ignore them.

The lower right quadrant is denoted as "unknown". Its content is neither known by the individual nor the others. We could think of special methods (e.g. of psychotherapy) to learn about this content, but to a large extent we could just think of experiences which can be made up. Any teacher who is new on his job will more or less nervously wait to experience how he will perform in front of a "real" class. S/he can"t know until the moment s/he does it and the expectations, the person and others may have, are just guesses. His or her ability to teach in front of a class exists in a way, but yet it is unknown to him as well as to the others. Sometimes it may be of interest to make some speculations about the content of the "unknown" area to find out more about oneself as well as a group. In our case it is of particular interest to keep in mind that there is an area of unknown things. Not everything that we or others might believe about ourselves is proven and we should modestly accept that our personality is not an open book – neither to us nor to others.

With these preliminaries we will now take a look at two approaches to using the Johari Window in order to optimise communication situations.

Sketching a crooked window
This method is useful for creating a fundamental understanding of the very fact that our communication is influenced by presumptions and opinions we have about ourselves and which may differ. The task in this case is simply to draw a personal Johari Window in which the size of the different areas shall correspond with the estimated "size" of the particular part of identity as it is assumed by the respective person.

Figure 4.6 shows different possible results. The first one shows a person who is quite open to others and yet reflects that there may be a big "blind" area. On the contrary, the private identity is rather small. One could imagine that it might be risky to probe this area any further. The second example is a bit more complex. This person seems to "stretch" the public identity into the areas of the "blind spot" and the "unknown", maybe by applying methods of self-assessment. The third example is that of a person, who actually doesn"t know too much about him or herself. This could be a reason why the public identity is very small, compared to the private identity – since the others know a lot about things that are unknown to the person, it seems reasonable to keep as much as possible of the identity, private.

Drawing such pictures could as well be done in a group or individually. The former gives an opportunity to learn about the differences within the group and can be a starting point for further discussion, which may lead to the method described below ("filling the gaps"). The latter is an elementary method of self-reflection. Based on the examples given above, one could evaluate one's own position towards privacy / public on the one hand and known / unknown on the other. Once a Johari Window is sketched, it could again be interesting to proceed with filling the areas according to certain questions.

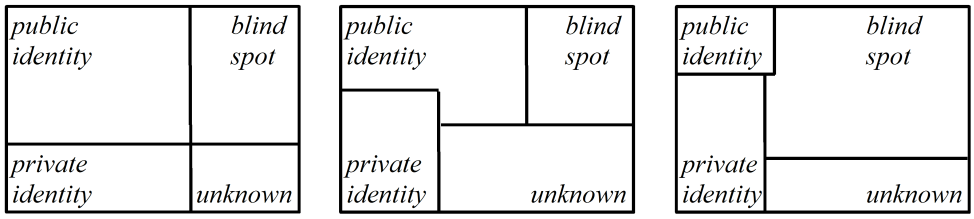

Figure 4.6: *Different shapes of Johari Windows*

The first method stays on the level of the amount of different parts of the identity. The following one adds the perspective on the content of those parts.

Filling the gaps
When filling the gaps, the individual obviously is bound to the left column, as the areas on the right side are defined by what the individual doesn"t know. Therefore it could be of particular especial interest to talk about this with others (though we already saw that this task isn"t free of risks). Yet, the starting point is the private area ("what do I know about myself"). The next step is to decide, which of those issues are more or less known to the public. Then it could be interesting to add the position of others ("blind spot"). Eventually, one can – alone or together – make guesses about the hidden area. A starting

point for the private perspective could be the following list of – quite personal – questions (taken from Sutton and Stewart 2002, pp 22ff):

1. Name: How important is it to you?
2. Gender: Are you satisfied with being who you are?
3. Body: Are you satisfied with your physical appearance?
4. Abilities: What are you particularly good at?
5. Mind: Do you feel okay about your intellectual ability?
6. Age: Are you comfortable with the age you are now?
7. Birth: How do you feel about where you were born?
8. Culture(s): Where were you brought up? If you have moved between different cultures, what influence has this had?
9. People: Who influenced you most when growing up?
10. Mother: What is your opinion of your mother?
11. Father: What is your opinion of your father? If you have no parents, how has that influenced you?
12. Siblings: What is your opinion of your brothers/sisters? If you have no brothers or sisters what influence has that had?
13. Education: What influence did your education have? What would you like to have achieved, but did not?
14. Employment: List the various jobs you have had, the people you remember associated with those jobs, the overall influence of the work and the associated people.
15. Spouse: If you are married, how has your spouse influenced you?
16. Children: How have your children influenced you? If you wanted children and were unable to have them, how has that influenced you?
17. Unmarried: If you are unmarried or have no partner, what influence does that have?
18. Values: What values do you have, and what influence do they exert? Have you taken them over from other people?
19. Beliefs: What are your fundamental beliefs? How did you acquire them?

20. Religion: If you are religious, what influence does that exert? If you have no religion, what influence does that exert?

21. Experiences: What life experiences are significant for you, and why?

22. Health: How have any illnesses or accidents influenced you?

23. Memories: What memories do you treasure, and what memories do you try hard to forget?

24. Relationships: What relationships in the past are you glad you had?

25. Authority: Who represents authority for you, in the past and now? What influence do these authority figures exert on you?

26. Strengths: What are your major strengths? How do they influence your professional work?

27. Weaknesses: What are your major weaknesses? How do they influence your professional work?

28. Virtues: What do you consider to be your virtues? How do they influence your behaviour?

29. Vices: Do you have any vices, and how do they influence your relationships?

When and where is it useful? Due to the fact that the methods are very personal, it is not easy to give a general suggestion or plan on how to work with them. The chances they provide are rooted rather in the group than in the method itself, so it is only to be emphasised that they should be applied with sensitivity. A good starting point would usually be to introduce the idea of the Johari Window and then discuss with the group, which way to proceed that is seen as appropriate. Both of the methods may increase the coherence and trust within a working group. But they may also be applied individually. Especially when you are moderating a communicative process within a certain group of people, it might be a valuable approach to clarify your own position, if you apply one of the Johari Window methods to find out about your identity within this group.

Variations: The variation possibilities of the two methods described above mainly lie in using them either in a group or for individuals and in the question of how to deal with the results. For example, starting with self-reflection as a group moderator may eventually lead to a broader discussion of reciprocal perception etc.

A further area of variation lies in the different topics and groups one may relate the method to. For example you could only reflect on your "public identity" within a steering committee. The list of questions given above may also be altered accordingly.

A rather creative approach with respect to school management might also be to adapt the method for something other than a person. How would the Johari Window of your school look like? What is the "public image" (school program, visual appearance etc.), what is "private" (alliances and animosities amongst the teaching staff etc.)? Could it be that there is also a "blind spot" (things that others know – and say – about the school though the members themselves are not aware of them)? And is there an "unknown" area – which may be worth exploring?

Activity 14:

Have you tried to sketch a Johari window for yourself while reading this section? If not, we would like to suggest doing so now.

4.10 Collegial consultation

(Alternative names and names of similar techniques: Collegial supervision; intervision; Balint groups; source: Fallner, Gräßlin 1990)

There are two types of collegial consultation. One is the simple case whereby colleagues informally discuss their work, problems and solutions etc., e.g. during breaks or in other types of informal meetings. Of course the use of this method of mutual support cannot easily be overestimated. However, Fallner and Gräßlin (1990) also suggested a more formal way of dealing with work issues in general, particularly with those related to communication, conflicts and other types of complex situations in which decisions have to be made. The main idea is that support is given by colleagues while a set of rules ensures that the method comes up with a particular type of result.

At a glance: Several colleagues form a group for collegial consultation. They should decide to meet on a regular basis to discuss ongoing issues of their work. While there is nothing to say against the informal discussion of those issues, the process of collegial consultation itself should be bound to some rules. The first is that the group has to decide on one case, e.g. by briefly discussing relevant criteria (generalisability, urgency,...). Then it has to assign the parts for each participant. The following parts have to be assigned:

- A client, who introduces the case and requires consultation.
- A moderator, who keeps track of the process, time etc.
- About two to four consultants.

If the group is bigger, further participants could take over the role of observers. Once the roles are assigned, the consultation follows a rather strict sequence of steps:

1. The client introduces the case, which means, s/he gives general information about the circumstances, the concrete case and the question(s), which are involved. This should take no longer than about 5 to 10 minutes.

2. The consultants may ask questions about further circumstances or conditions of the case, they deem necessary for them to be able to understand the situation. At this stage they must not come up with interpretations, or suggestions on how to solve the situation etc. There shall not be any discussions.

3. Now the group discusses the case (and again doesn"t look for particular solutions). They have an exchange about the conditions, raise hypothesises etc. Their task is to mutually develop a clear and yet complex picture of the situation from which they eventually derive their suggestions. At this stage, the client could listen, but must not contribute to the discussion. This phase may take about 15 minutes. Afterwards, the consultants individually write down a suggestion.

4. Now one after the other the consultants tell the client, what they would do in his/her situation. Here it is quite important that they don"t try to convince the client of a certain idea, interpretation etc. Therefore they should stick to formulations like "If I were in your situation, I would probably...".

5. The client now gives feedback to the group. S/he should particularly give an idea of which of the suggestions s/he intends to follow. Of course this should not be a competition ("who made the best suggestions"), but a neutral feedback to the consultants, who should also reflect on other suggestions they would follow if they were in the situation of the client.

The whole process of collegial consultation may take about 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours depending on the case and the practise the participants have with the methods. Throughout the whole process the moderator's part is to keep an eye on the time and to distinctly but friendly remind the participants of the rules. It is particularly necessary that the different stages are related to their particular task, e.g. there must not be a discussion on the validity of solutions at all.

When and where is it useful? Collegial consultation is mainly related to teams of similar tasks which feel a need to professionally reflect on their practise without contracting a supervisor. A particular application area is vocational training or phases in which several people start working together in a new field. But collegial consultation may also be useful as an accompanying measurement in processes of organisational development through teams.

Variations: As the different names of this method already indicate, there is a variety of similar methods of collegial consultation. They mainly differ with respect to the details of the different parts and the schedule of the consultation process. Though collegial consultation is often recommended as a tool to be used regularly, it should be mentioned that a single session of collegial consultation may also turn out useful in certain situations. It should also be mentioned that

regular conferences, as they came up in different branches of reform pedagogy, may be used in a way similar to collegial consultation and supervision. This approach is particularly vivid in Waldorf schools (Brater, Hemmer-Schanze, Schmelzer 2006).

4.11 Jigsaw

(Alternative names and names of similar techniques: expert groups; beehive; source: Tewksbury, N.D.; Saskaton Public Schools, N.D.)

The jigsaw technique (cf. Figure 4.7)is a way of organising group work, which originally is applied in classroom situations but may also be used as a method of cooperation. The general idea is to distribute a task into several parts, which are distributed to several groups. In a second phase new groups composed of the members of the former group now deal with the overall task.

At a glance: The starting point of a jigsaw is a task which on the one hand can be split into parts but which on the other hand requires that the parts eventually be reassembled. The procedure is as follows:

1. Split the task into several parts according to a possible number of groups (1, 2, 3, . . .)

2. Now each group deals with its particular task.

3. In the second phase new groups are built, whereby each group must have at least one member of each of the former groups.

4. The task of the new groups is to assemble a solution for the overall task out of the contribution of each partial group. Therefore usually the representatives of the former groups (1, 2, 3,. . .) first introduce their result.

5. It may be useful to briefly discuss the overall results in a plenary session. Yet in some cases this is not even necessary or it might be enough just to discuss questions which may have arisen.

When and where is it useful? As the method stems from the field of course design, its main value is to solve a typical classroom situation: One implements a phase of group work and once the students have successfully finished it, there has to be some presentation in which often all groups present similar results, which may be quite boring and furthermore devalues their work since their single contribution seems rather superfluous. In contrast to such classroom situations, the jigsaw method has several advantages: It can be used without a plenary presentation at all (as long as there is an opportunity to clarify questions). Furthermore each of the participants in the second phase has individual importance in the process since s/he is usually the only one who can contribute to the work with respect to the tasks of the first phase. Finally, the

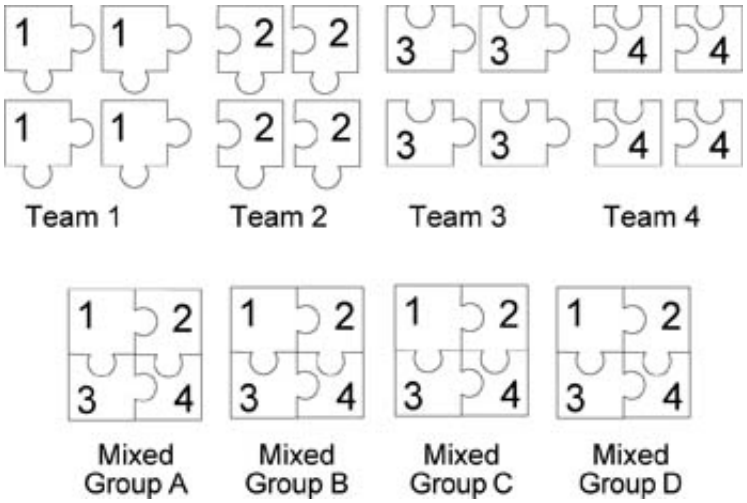

Figure 4.7: *Diagram of the jigsaw method (from Tewskbury, N.D.). Source: http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/coursedesign/tutorial/jigsaw.html*

groups have to decide on a feasible overall solution for the task, where the ideas of the individuals are represented in such a way that they already fit into a mutual work. Those advantages also hold true for the use of the jigsaw method as a tool for cooperative work.

Example: Let us think of a group of teachers whose task it is to prepare a school celebration. While this task might easily be distributed into parts (some care for food, some care for music etc.), the celebration may serve a particular aim and it would be necessary to have this as a leitmotif throughout all the individual activities (e.g. the celebration is to be used to start a new program to give more aid to unprivileged students and their families). The task can be divided as suggested above, but each group has to keep in mind that they provide a solution for their problem (food, music,...) with respect to this overall motto. The expert groups then try to merge the individual solutions into one concept for the celebration. Eventually, in this case the concepts could be presented in a plenary session providing a basis to now come to a mutual plan for the project.

Variations: The variety of the method rather lies in the different occasions to which it is applied rather than in the procedure itself.

4.12 Methods of feedback and evaluation – a collection

Any professional task does not only necessitate acting accordingly in situations of application, but also involves gathering feedback on if it was successful or to what extent additional effort is needed, respectively. A meeting may have taken place in a friendly and familiar atmosphere, yet, instead of leading to mutual agreement it may be that each participant has drawn his or her own conclusion – and eventually the mutual action on the basis of this meeting may

turn out quite unsatisfying. It could also be that a meeting seems to be heavily burdened with argument, but for that very reason the results form a stable basis for further action. Finally, it is quite often the case that the moderator tried his best to provide a climate of understanding and respect but after the meeting s/he is just uncertain if s/he was successful at all. All those tasks require suitable methods of evaluation and feedback.

As the areas of application vary, so do the methods themselves. In the following section we will give an overview of some of the most common methods, which are easy to apply and open to variations.

At a glance:

Evaluation target
An easy way to individually receive results about particular aspects of a meeting is the evaluation target. Simply prepare a target on a large sheet of paper, a blackboard etc. Now ask the participants to put stickers (or draw crosses etc.) at the target with respect to a certain question. You may use one question (e.g. "The climate of the meeting was very good") or distribute the target into several areas and ask the participants to give several marks (see Figure 4.8). In both cases the centre of the target may represent the criterion to be fulfilled while the outer areas point to further necessary efforts with respect to it. You may use this method several times to monitor the development in a group with respect to certain criteria.

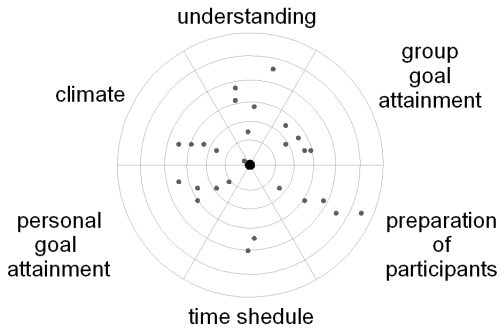

Figure 4.8: *An evaluation target with six areas of evaluation and five participants*

Evaluation Questionnaire
In adult and continuing education using a questionnaire is probably the most common method of evaluation and getting feedback. Therefore it does not seem necessary to provide an example here. Instead we would just suggest not to stick to the usual questions ("In general I am satisfied with the results of the meeting"), but also think of alternative ones leading to particular aspects of the meeting ("I would have enjoyed it if this meeting had taken longer"). Furthermore we would like to address two issues which seem crucial for evaluation questionnaires: 1) It has to be clear that the results of the questionnaires are really used to improve practise. Meetings don"t become better just by spreading evaluation sheets but by learning out of their results. 2) Anonymity may play an important role in both directions. While some things are easier to say as long

as one stays unknown, others require a more personal relationship. Therefore we suggest to combine anonymous methods (like questionnaires with closed questions where you only tick items) and open, non-anonymous methods (like the flash light).

Flash light (variation)

The flash light method is described in section 4.4. Besides the application areas described there, it is also useful for evaluation and feedback. You may ask a question about the aspect of the meeting, you wish to hear feedback about, and start the flash light round. Sometimes it may be useful – to increase the usefulness as well as to put in some variation – to set up a certain rule like "Please give a short statement of your impression of the climate in this meeting but avoid using the word "good"".

Standing in a queue

This is a very quick and yet insightful method for finding out general and particular information about one or more aspects of a summit. To use it, you start with a question like "What was your impression about our attainment of mutual goals in this meeting?". Then the participants are asked to take over a physical position in the room with respect to this question (e.g. standing in the front means "very satisfied" while standing in the back means "not at all satisfied"). Of course any intermediate position is possible. The distribution of the participants gives a first impression about the general attitude towards this question. Furthermore you could ask certain people at different positions the reasons why they chose this particular place.

Individual and creative methods

While the examples up to now rather provided methods for monitoring opinions on general questions about the quality of a meeting, you may also be interested in the particular results in the perspective of the individual participants. Generally this requires more creativity and individuality from both the evaluator and the participant, and the results are less easy to collect on a systematic basis. Yet, sometimes it may be useful to implement them, e.g. to recollect results or set a basis for further action. An example is the "headline method". Here all participants are asked to provide a "headline" as it would appear in a newspaper with respect to a certain question like "Up to now, what would be the most important result of the meeting(s) according to your point of view?". A method for recollecting some of the further results is the "alphabet method" where the participants are requested to say and describe one key word with respect to the overall aim of the communication process, thereby following the alphabet.

When and where is it useful? While evaluation is usually related to a systematic process of measuring the outcomes of a process and uses data collected for planning, improvement and management, feedback is a less formal way of gathering information about a process and how it can be optimised. Whether the former or the latter is executed, is rather a question of the institutional strategy – especially as regards questions of quality assuring. From the practical point of view both may look similar. Evaluation methods provide feedback and feedback methods can be used within a comprehensive strategy of evaluation.

From the perspective of one who moderates discussions, leads meetings etc. feedback is important for improving one's own skills in this respect and for preventing difficulties arising from ongoing disturbances in the communication process. Therefore we recommend using methods of feedback on a regular basis to monitor one's own communication skills as well as the discussion processes which are important for the organisation.

Variations: Each of the methods above can be varied and furthermore there are lots of different methods for gathering feedback. Since this study text is addressed to people working together with professionals in the field of education, we also recommend that colleagues and other professionals be asked about their experience with methods of evaluation and give them a try.

4.13 Evaluation of the methods and tools

In chapter 3.1 we suggested evaluating methods and tools of communication with respect to their use. The aim of this is to become more familiar with their advantages and disadvantages. Since this would help you remember what qualities a certain recipe for cooking had (Who liked it? Are there certain ingredients difficult to find? Does it require more time than expected?...) you can also prepare some notes for yourself regarding the tools and methods presented in this study text (and of course you can also apply this evaluation checklist (Figure 4.9) to other methods).

After using a particular method or tool in a certain context, please fill in the following questionnaire – or go through it carefully and try to remember the questions and answers with regards to your experience with the method.

1. I applied the method / tool without changes.

☐ yes ☐ no

If "no": What changes did I make?

_____

2. I implemented the method within the following situation:

_____

_____

3. According to the description of the method, this application is appropriate?

totally yes	rather yes	more or less	rather no	not at all
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. The method turned out useful in this situation:

totally yes	rather yes	more or less	rather no	not at all
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. I would expect that if I apply the method in a similar situation, the results would be more or less the same.

totally yes	rather yes	more or less	rather no	not at all
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. I would expect this method to be useful in the following situation(s):

_____

_____

7. The following conditions regarding the participants seem crucial for this method (e.g. mutual trustfulness, prior knowledge,…):

_____

_____

8. The following conditions regarding the material situation seem crucial for this method (equipment, room, noise,…)

_____

_____

9. I plan to use this method again:

totally yes	rather yes	more or less	rather no	not at all
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

If "totally" or "rather yes": When?

_____

If "rather no" or "not at all": Why?

_____

If "more or less": Under what conditions would it be probable?

_____

10. I will recommend this method to my colleague(s).

totally yes	rather yes	more or less	rather no	not at all
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

If "totally yes", "rather yes" or "more or less": To which of them and for what purpose?

_____

Figure 4.9: *Evaluation checklist*

When and where is it useful? Reflection in general at its core means to develop and maintain the ability to work in complex fields like education, adult education, moderation, leadership etc. This particular method is intended to be a tool that is simple to use for reflecting the use of methods within such processes. Furthermore it may give some hints about general circumstances from the answers given to e.g. questions 7, 8 or 10.

Variations: Of course you can easily expand or change the questions according to your particular needs. Besides it might be interesting to go through a series of questionnaires you filled in the past and look for particular characteristics of the answers. Possible questions for examination could be: How is the relationship between my own estimation of usefulness and my plan to recommend the method to others? Is it always the same, no matter to whom I recommend the methods? Is there a mutual characteristic among all methods I like best? Etc.