



An Interactional Analysis of a Statistics Consultation

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Presentation set-up:

- Interactional View of Communication, Paul Watzlawick
- For each axiom I will discuss one observation made during the consultation
 1. One cannot not communicate
 2. Communication = Content + Relationship
 3. Punctuation of the communication sequence affects the nature of the relationship
 4. Communication involves digital and analogic modalities
 5. All communication is either symmetrical or complementary

Context of the consultation:

- Professional consultation by Peter at UMC
- The consultation request included a brief message asking for help in visualizing the results of an analysis (likely a GLM) with multiple covariates
- When entering the room for the consultation we saw three people already sat at the table, appearing to be two PhDs/students (at one side of the table) and a professor (at the other side)

One cannot not communicate

- Communication is inevitable. Even when trying to avoid communication, the nonverbal messages we send still impact others. The corollary is: one cannot not influence.

→ Posture to communicate participation, understanding, power

Communication = Content + Relationship

- Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect, such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore met-communication.
(content = what, relationship = how)
- "That's really something to think about", instead of "That's a bad idea".
(what's the relationship you have + what's the relationship you want to establish?)

The nature of the relationship depends on how parties punctuate the communication sequence

- Punctuation = the mental process of interpreting an ongoing sequence of events, labeling one event as cause and the other as response. Participants may view this sequence radically differently.
- After introductions and while presenting the RQ the professor momentarily paused to explain (mostly to me) the medical background of their research and why + how they collected the data

Communication involves digital and analogic modalities

- The digital mode is what words actually mean, the analog mode has to do with nonverbal cues that go along with it. E.g. participants can send two opposing messages at the same time.

→ Nodding yes + silent blank stare

All communication is either symmetrical or complementary

- A symmetrical exchange is based on equal power, complementary exchange is based on differences in power.

→ The professor replied to a question that a certain variable “probably [had] a 10/15 range” while, almost at the same time, one of the students said “[the values are] between 40/130”, thus a range of 90. The remark was so quiet nobody heard it, the student wobbled her head for a second but did not correct the professor.

Thank you!