

# **Nonviolent Communication – a Communication Tool to support the Adaptive Capacity of Organisations?**

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## **Abstract**

Adaptive capacity is essential for organisations to be able to adapt to the sustainability challenge, and change its course. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is an interpersonal communication tool that enables a user to move from a language of judgments to a language of needs by using 4 steps: observation, feelings, needs, and request. As communication is essential to the adaptive capacity of a social system, this thesis explores the question: How does Nonviolent Communication support the adaptive capacity of organisations?

Through a mixed methods approach (semi-structured interviews and surveys with NVC trainers, organisational representatives and employees), the effects of NVC on communication in 3 sample organisations in the Netherlands (a school, NGO and research institute), is explored. Quantitative survey results show that NVC has a positive to very positive effect on common organisational communication dynamics. Qualitative data supports this finding and shows that NVC brings positive effects of increased understanding, listening, and progress in work related issues through an increased awareness of one's own and other's needs and feelings. When linking these results to adaptive capacity of organisations, it is concluded that NVC directly supports the adaptive capacity elements of trust, diversity and learning, and indirectly supports common meaning and self-organisation.

## **Keywords**

Adaptive Capacity, Communication, Nonviolent Communication (NVC), Organisation, Resilience, Social sustainability

## Statement of Contribution

Our first step after team formation was sitting down to talk through our different expectations for the project. Why did NVC appeal to us? The reasons were different, informed by our different backgrounds, with some of us thinking about large scale societal transition and others more concerned with singular organisational environments and daily life. The different angles were respected and we started to look at who we each were as individuals, and how working styles and motivations could complement each other. A process which continued all through the process with weekly reflections, sometimes with comfort on a Sunday afternoon and sometimes a snatched half an hour at the end of an exhausting week. These reflections were vital and covered many topics and we are proud to say that we have stayed true with each other and the laughter has outweighed the tensions.

We started gaining some knowledge of the topic earlier in the year Thekla had run 2 separate hour long evening sessions to introduce NVC to her peer-group at the university. We started to really dive into the topic with two more of these sessions taking place in the first month after our thesis topic was chosen. Other than this NVC was a completely new field for 2 of the researchers and so a copy of Rosenberg's (2003) book was sourced and passed around the team with much discussion. Within a month our interviews had started and interviews with different parts of our sample continued at different times all through the process. Each interviewee provided continuing inspiration and motivation to pursue a topic which had deeply affected them.

Each team member has taken on their tasks and struggled and thrived at different points of the academic process, but it is the topic itself which will undoubtedly continue to grow for each of us. Below is a little more information on each of the team members, as described by their peers:

### *Harry Bonnell*

Harry started his contribution to this thesis by enthusiastically reading extensively about NVC through which he could bring in knowledge about the current state of NVC research and the potentials of NVC in organisations. He started the writing process of many of the chapters in the thesis, which provided his team members with plenty to build on. Furthermore, he continued to bring poetry to the writing in general throughout the whole process. He analysed most of the interview data and his ability to see connections that are maybe less obvious to others enriched the research design and discussion.

Harry's awareness of when the team needed a different process to keep spirits high, helped us to keep being productive when energy was low. In general, his care for team members and positive energy was of great support.

### *Ping Li, known as Chloe*

Already during the thesis team formation process one of Chloe's important contributions showed up: her skill to ask critical questions. Throughout the whole thesis project she asked questions that forced her team members to think critically and express themselves in a clearer manner. Also, this asset brought great value to the process of interviewing trainers and employees and helped us to get richer data. During the analysis phase of the thesis Chloe transcribed diligently and has produced with care and commitment many visuals in the report and presentation.

Chloe is a determined and motivated person who showed a lot of passion for the project and

learning in general, striving to keep meetings and the team organised. Her sense of humour and care for her team mates helped to keep the team together and hold priorities which went beyond our submitted work.

### *Thekla van Lingen*

Thekla proposed this thesis topic and as such has been passionate and dedicated to it from the beginning, whilst still being open in the process and the direction brought by teammates. Her stories and experience related to NVC allowed the team to build a rich foundation of understanding from the beginning.

With regards to writing the paper, Thekla was able to hold the overall structure of the thesis, and each section, in place. This allowed for much greater safety and confidence from others when completing their contributions. Thekla is “a perfectionist”, who works hard on refinement of content, this has allowed, for example, the survey questions and structure, to reach a high level of precision and overall quality.

With regards to the team process, Thekla is a supportive team mate and, although focused on work, still seeks to prioritise the health and emotional state of team mates. Overall Thekla has contributed much and been a joy to work with.



Harry Bonnell



Ping Li



Thekla van Lingen

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- Especial gratitude is extended to our advisors Alexander Craig and Patricia (“Tita”) Lagun Mesquita who have gone well beyond the role of their duties in both their ‘transactional’ and ‘relational’ aspects of communication. Their insistence upon embedding certain frames to our work at an early stage, and other technical guidance, helped immeasurably. Their care and patience is also greatly appreciated.
- Merlina Missimer generously gave her time and expertise both directly to us and indirectly to our advisors. We are grateful for her challenges and the push she provided as well as her overall attitude and work which will remain inspirational.
- A huge thank you must extend to Roan Lakerveld. His involvement as ‘external consultant’ has been valuable from the very first exploration of the topic and our potential research questions. This unrequired commitment has continued with the aiding of the translation of survey results, which made a strenuous workload bearable. His support, good humour and kind nature are greatly appreciated.
- We thank all of the organisations, employees and trainers who generously gave their time. This research would have been impossible without them. Beyond the practical data we received they provided inspiration and insight that will last with us all for many years. We are grateful for their trust in us and in their sharing of their stories and journeys related to NVC, and for many sharing their vulnerabilities.
- Sarah Fwer for generously giving her time to provide reassurance and clarification at an early stage of our work.
- Several of our classmates for taking the time - which they likely didn’t freely have - to trial our survey and give us valuable feedback.
- All those involved with the MSLS programme design. Amongst other contributions, the structure and timeline for regular document drafts and check-ins was essential to keep us moving and make the process of writing this thesis manageable.
- Our family and friends for their support and reassurance during difficult times, as well as helping us keep a sense of perspective.

And finally, the entire MSLS class for being part of this journey together, for their insights and laughter and their genuine goodwill for each other and the world.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Society has already crossed several boundaries of the planetary system (Rockström et al. 2009), and the consequences are likely to be severe. There is an urgency to act and change our interaction with the biosphere in order to avert irreversible tipping points and destruction of critical systems in the wider biosphere, upon which we depend (Robèrt et al 1997). The SSD provides a strategic framework for how society might stay within the planetary boundaries and be sustainable. There are 3 ecological sustainability principles (SPs) and 5 social SPs which form the boundaries within which society should stay. The 5 social SPs are: In a sustainable society, people are not subject to structural obstacles to (1) health, (2) influence, (3) competence, (4) impartiality and (5) meaning-making. These social SPs have been derived from the concept of resilience, or adaptive capacity (AC), of a complex social system (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017b). There are 5 elements that aid the AC of a social system: diversity, learning, self-organisation, trust and meaning making. If these 5 elements are present amongst the members of a social system, it is likely to be resilient and able to adapt in the face of large internal or external changes.

Organisations form a large part of the makeup of our society and are social systems in themselves. They have a significant impact on the sustainability of society and need to change their operations. Also, changes caused by unsustainable actions of humans, such as climate change and migration, are likely to impact organisations (Linnenluecke and Griffiths 2010). To be able to face those changes, and make the changes that are necessary to become sustainable, organisations need to have adaptive capacity.

Communication is essential for organisations to function and it can be argued that organisations are a manifestation of communication and the functions it provides (Koschman 2012). Communication comes in many forms in organisations and there are many communication dynamics going on in the day-to-day operations of an organisation. Also, communication plays a significant role in how the elements of AC are supported. For example, effective internal communication plays a vital role in creating trust amongst the employees of an organisation (Men and Stacks 2014).

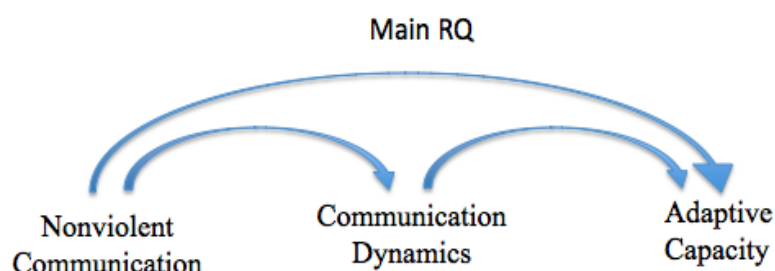
A specific communication tool that might help in supporting those elements of AC is Nonviolent Communication (NVC). Designed by Marshall Rosenberg (2003), its aim is to promote connection to ourselves and others, by focusing on the needs that motivate our behaviour and communication. A 4 step process aids practitioners in doing so: (1) to observe without evaluation, (2) to identify feelings, (3) to identify underlying needs, and (4) to formulate a request that might help in fulfilling those needs. These 4 steps can be applied to connect with one's own needs internally (self-connection), to communicate one's own needs (expressing) and/or to listen to the needs of others (listening).

Guided by the above and considering there is little research available on the use of NVC in organisations and its effects on internal communication, let alone the organisation as a system and its AC, the main research question of this thesis is:

*How does Nonviolent Communication support the adaptive capacity of organisations?*

## Research process

To be able to find an answer to the main research question, communication dynamics in organisations were used as a bridge between NVC and AC (see the figure below).



*Using Communication Dynamics in organisations as a bridge between NVC and AC*

### Phase 1 – Conceptual Framework

Two SRQs were formulated for this phase. SRQ A: “What are communication dynamics in organisations?” and SRQ B: “How might communication dynamics influence the adaptive capacity of an organisation?”. For SRQ A, a literature review was used to identify common communication dynamics (CDs) in organisations. In total 9 communication dynamics were identified. For SRQ B the possible influence of those CDs on the AC of an organisation was explored through a process of categorisation and expert opinion. This formed the outline of the conceptual framework that was used in later phases.

### Phase 2 - Nonviolent Communication and Communication Dynamics in the sample organisations

Firstly, 3 sample organisations were selected for conducting the rest of the research. The selected organisations were a health NGO, a school and a research institute, all using NVC for internal communication and all based in the Netherlands.

To get a better understanding of the sample organisations, the following two SRQs were formulated for phase 2: SRQ C: “How has Nonviolent Communication been introduced and how is it practiced in the sample organisations?” and SRQ D: “How are the identified common communication dynamics present in the sample organisations?”

Answers to those questions were sought through preliminary semi-structured interviews and a survey amongst one organisational representative for each organisation.

### Phase 3 - Effects of Nonviolent Communication on Communication Dynamics in organisations

This phase focused on the final SRQ E: “What are the effects of Nonviolent Communication on communication dynamics in organisations?” The main research tool for this phase was a survey amongst employees trained in NVC, in the sample organisations. This survey included a quantitative question and an open, qualitative question per communication dynamic. The survey generated 40 responses on the effects of NVC on the organisational communication dynamics identified in the previous phases. Furthermore, semi-structured follow up interviews with 1 or 2 employees per organisation, and semi-structured interviews with 4 certified NVC trainers were used to increase the understanding gained from the survey. The quantitative data was analysed and all qualitative data was first coded and then analysed.

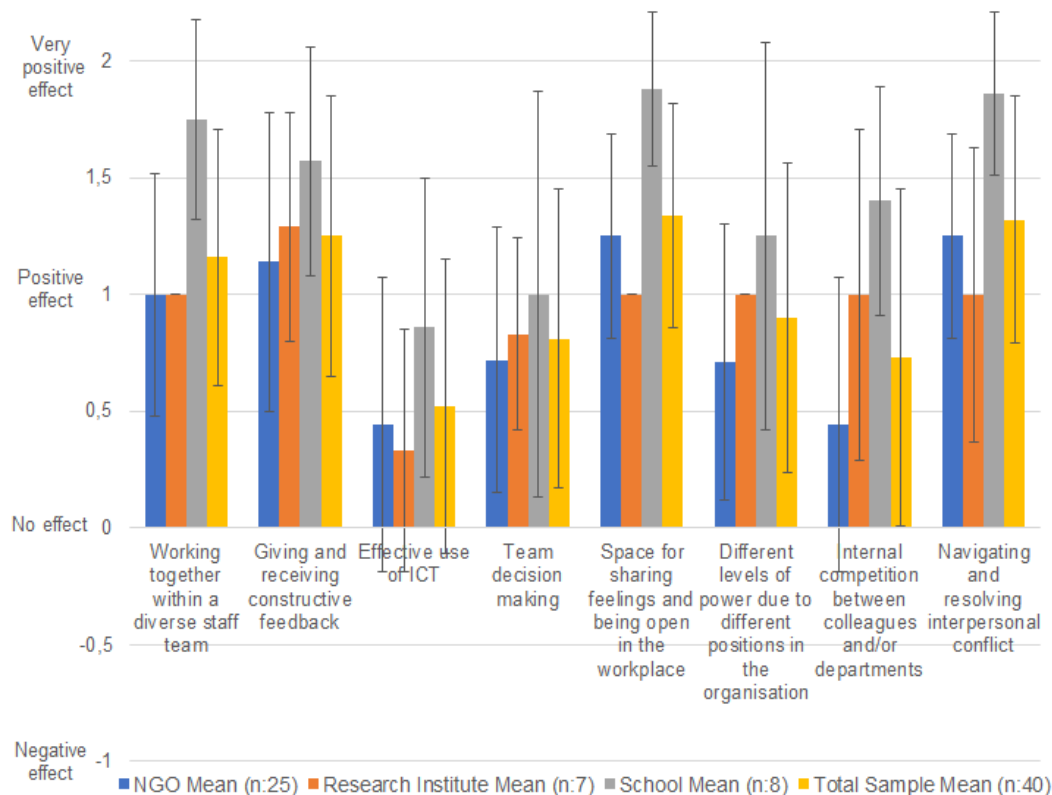


## Results

In total 9 communication dynamics that play a role in organisations were identified (SRQ A). The results from the survey amongst organisational representatives confirmed that all of these dynamics were present to a certain extent in the sample organisations (SRQ D). Based on these results, 1 dynamic that seemed least present was excluded from the employee survey, to ensure a survey length that would generate as many responses as possible. The 8 identified communication dynamics that were used throughout the rest of this research are: working together within a diverse staff team, giving and receiving constructive feedback, effective use of Information Communication Technology, team decision making, space for sharing feelings and being open in the workplace, different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation, internal competition between colleagues and/or departments, and navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict. These 8 communication dynamics were found to have a potential impact on each of the 5 elements of adaptive capacity (trust, diversity, common meaning, self-organisation and learning) (SRQ B).

The results from the survey amongst organisational representatives also clarified that NVC has been implemented to a different extent in the three sample organisations. In the Research Institute, 35 out of 400 employees were trained through a basic course (6 half days) at the moment of research. In the NGO, about 70 out of 140 employees had followed a basic course, and in the School all 8 employees had followed at least a basic course, and were also trained for a full day every month throughout the year.

The quantitative results for the employee survey on the effects of NVC on the communication dynamics are displayed in the figure below. As can be seen, NVC has a positive to very positive effect on all communication dynamics in all 3-sample organisations.



*The effects of Nonviolent Communication on each communication dynamic per organisation*

Identified positive effects of NVC on the communication dynamics were: increased understanding, progress in work and/or relationship related issues, space for conversations that were not held before, increased openness and sharing, a higher ability to see/work with different perspectives and working styles, sense of safety, space for honesty, sense of connection, and more awareness.

These effects were confirmed by the interviewed employees of each organisation. The interviews with trainers informed the researchers how NVC could create those effects. Its focus on needs seems to be the main contribution of NVC, as it enables people to see similarities between themselves and others and creates understanding. Also, the formulation of clear requests enables people to ask for and take necessary actions.

## **Discussion**

The 3 sample organisations studied in this research were very different, operating across different sectors and with different staff sizes. In addition they all implemented and practiced NVC in different ways. However, they all still rated NVCs effect on communication dynamics as positive and had a similar ranking of which dynamics were most or least affected by NVC. This implies that NVC is an adaptable method which can suit many organisational contexts and still have positive effects. Of note was the school which practiced NVC with a much higher frequency and intention than the other organisations and rated the highest average score for NVCs effect on each dynamic.

All communication dynamics, fitting at different levels of the system (i.e. one-to-one, team and organisational communication), were scored as having been positively affected by NVC. Qualitative responses from the survey and interview show that they achieved these positive affects primarily through increased expression and listening, as well as by keeping comments related to one's own experience rather than judging the other's behaviour. These traits helped to create better understanding of each other's motivations and would likely help work and relational issues progress. Effective use of ICT received the lowest average score, but several qualitative responses and academic literature indicate a higher potential. Further research on this topic is suggested. 'Internal competition between individuals and/or departments' received mixed scores and few qualitative responses, so the researchers were unable to draw solid conclusions and would suggest further research with alternate organisations.

The qualitative data from employee surveys and results highlight key insights related to context impacting effectiveness of NVC. Organisational structure as well as other contextual factors can be used to create a secure environment which allows for the support needed to practice NVC and allow for the vulnerability which comes from honestly expressing one's feelings and needs. A major contextual factor which aids this secure environment and generally aids wider understanding is ensuring that enough people within an organisation, including management, are trained in NVC to allow for it to become a shared language.

When linking these results to adaptive capacity of organisations, it is concluded that NVC directly supports the adaptive capacity elements of trust, diversity and learning, and indirectly supports common meaning and self-organisation. These results are discussed below.

**Diversity:** Having many different opinions and perspectives, increases the possibility that one of those strategies helps resilience in cases of change or shock. The results for the CD of

working together within a diverse staff team shows that NVC creates understanding and enables people to see and work with different perspectives. NVC also aids in navigating the challenges that diversity brings, such as conflict.

**Trust:** Trust is what keeps a social system together and can be defined as “the willingness to be vulnerable to another party” (Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis 2007). By creating space for sharing and openness, NVC increases trust, as it allows people to be vulnerable. In addition trust is influenced by another person’s ‘motivations of benevolence’ and whether one feels significant in another’s eyes (reference). By encouraging listening and expression NVC helps understand people’s motivations and allows people to be heard, both contributing to trust.

**Learning:** A system, like its individual members, needs to learn from experience and sense change in order to respond appropriately (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a). The space for listening and expression that NVC creates enhances learning by bringing additional input into the system and spreading this input through the system by influencing communication dynamics such as team decision making or communicating across different levels of power. Results show that NVC strongly supports the giving and receiving of feedback, which is essential for a learning organisation. Additionally, NVC seeks to look beyond judgements creating an environment where individuals are able to admit mistakes. This increases opportunities for learning.

**Common meaning:** Common meaning is essential in a system to give it purpose. Humans are a meaning making and meaning seeking species and need purpose in order to exist and thrive (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a). This research does not show that NVC contributes directly to common meaning of an organisational system. However, NVC could help in the process of creating common meaning by helping with shared understanding between individuals and resolving misunderstandings or conflicts.

**Self-organisation:** Self-organisation is required by a system to rapidly respond to changing circumstances without having to rely upon centralised intent or control (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a). NVC’s effect here is uncertain. It can help members of a system organise by the additional input of allowing people to be heard and by focusing on the input of feelings and needs. However, self-organisation also requires autonomy and responsibility which is more dependent on the organisational structure level than the interpersonal level affected by NVC. NVC can influence this structural level by for example, influencing management or increasing trust, but contextual considerations are especially relevant.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to investigate and answer the question: *How does Nonviolent Communication support the adaptive capacity of organisations?*, in order to better understand how NVC might contribute to organisations’ need to change in the face of the sustainability challenge. The results suggest that if organisations use NVC in combination with the right contextual factors it will have a positive effect on many, if not most, communication dynamics present in organisations. By positively influencing communication dynamics through greater understanding of individuals feelings and needs all 5 elements of adaptive capacity can be supported.

## List of Abbreviations

<b>AC</b>	Adaptive Capacity
<b>BTH</b>	Blekinge Tekniska Högskola
<b>CD</b>	Communications Dynamic
<b>FSSD</b>	Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development
<b>IC</b>	Integrated Clarity
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NVC</b>	Nonviolent Communication
<b>SD</b>	Standard Deviation
<b>SRQ</b>	Sub-Research Question
<b>SP</b>	Sustainability Principle
<b>SSD</b>	Strategic Sustainable Development
<b>SSP</b>	Social Sustainability Principle

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# 1. Introduction

Humanity, as a social species, has the ability to organise and achieve more as a group than it could as a sum of its parts. Organisations today manifest in all kinds of forms and scales, but what is common within them is the necessity of communication to create or interpret meaning and subsequently allow for coordination. With the increasingly apparent scale of the sustainability challenge, organisations need to be able to cope with, and respond to the changes that are happening. Communication between members of organisational systems plays an important role in supporting organisations as they respond. A tool with the potential to support this communication is ‘Nonviolent Communication’, developed from the study of human psychology and already used in organisations globally.

## 1.1 Sustainability Challenge

The Earth, itself is a closed system to matter and open to energy from the sun, is comprised of several interrelated subsystems. The system known as the ‘biosphere’, consisting of the Earth’s surface, atmosphere and oceans, contains life. The ‘lithosphere’ is the Earth’s crust and contains minerals. According to the laws of thermodynamics Earth only has a finite amount of resources that can be shaped and reshaped by ecological or societal processes. Humanity’s place within the biosphere is termed the ‘social system’, and it relies upon a complex interrelationship with all other parts of the biosphere. (Robèrt et al. 1997)

It is widely acknowledged that the biosphere and lithosphere’s flows have shifted in a way that justifies stating that Earth has entered a new geological age – the Anthropocene (Zalasiewicz et al. 2011). Rockström et al. (2009) describe the Anthropocene as an epoch in which “humans constitute the dominant driver of change to the Earth System”. This era is marked by extremely rapid changes on a global scale, including the loss of biodiversity, degradation of land and shortages of drinking water, which threaten the resilience of Earth and it’s social systems (Steffen et al. 2011)

Since we have already crossed several boundaries of the planetary system (Rockström et al. 2009), with potentially severe consequences, there is an urgency to act and change our interaction with the biosphere in order to avert irreversible tipping points and destruction of critical systems in the wider biosphere, upon which we depend (Robèrt et al. 1997). We refer to the need to change humanity's interactions with the biosphere as the sustainability challenge.

## 1.2 Defining Sustainability

There are many ways of defining sustainability and sustainable development. However, most of these are not clear about how to get to sustainability. E.g. the World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Brundtland 1987). This is quite an inclusive definition, taking also future generations into account. What it does not tell us, however, is what we can do in order to not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Another definition of sustainability is the “triple bottom line”, also known as the 3Ps of People, Planet and Profit (Kajikawa 2008). It emphasizes the need to look at the sustainability of the environment, society and the economy at the same time. Again, this definition provides no guidelines on what this sustainability should

look like or how it should be reached. As evidence is increasing that the environment and society are and will be under more pressure due to the sustainability challenge outlined above, a clear definition that gives an outline of what actions can be undertaken to change unsustainable behaviour is needed.

The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) offers a more workable definition by providing boundary conditions for a sustainable society (Broman and Robèrt 2017). These boundary conditions are based on a scientifically agreed upon view of the world, necessary and sufficient to achieve sustainability, non-overlapping, general enough to be applicable in all situations regarding sustainability and concrete enough to guide action (Robèrt et al. 2015). Within these boundary conditions we can shape society as we want, as long as the boundary conditions are met, it will be sustainable. Offering a clear vision on how to be sustainable, those boundary conditions allow for backcasting from success (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000). This means that we can create a compelling vision of the future, look at where we are now and then come up with creative ideas and steps that we can take to come closer to our vision. The strategic guidelines of the FSSD help to prioritize which ideas are most likely to bring us to this vision.

The FSSD regards the biosphere, society and the economy as nested systems. Society is a subsystem of the biosphere, and the economy is a subsystem of society (Robèrt et al. 2015). This is another reason why the concept of People, Planet, Profit is an incomplete definition of sustainability; as it regards all systems as equal, rather than nested systems, it does not acknowledge that society depends on the biosphere, and that the economy cannot exist without society.

The boundary conditions for sustainability are called the sustainability principles (SPs). There are three environmental SPs that have stood scientific scrutiny for over 25 years. These SPs are: In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...

1. ...concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust.
2. ...concentrations of substances produced by society;
3. ...degradation by physical means.

Until a few years ago, the fourth, social SP read: "In a sustainable society, people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs." (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a 33) Since this SP was rather vague, it has been operationalized into five social sustainability principles (SSPs) in order to give clearer boundary conditions and get a better sense of what actions can be undertaken in order to stay within those boundary conditions (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017b) . These social SPs are:

In a sustainable society, people are not subject to structural obstacles to...

4. ... health.
5. ... influence.
6. ... competence.
7. ... impartiality.
8. ... meaning-making.

These SSPs have been derived from the concept of adaptive capacity (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017b), which will be further explored in the next section.

### 1.3 Adaptive Capacity

Human systems can be seen as complex adaptive systems. Human social agents (individuals or groups) make up those systems and their relationships form the interactions within the system. The larger social system, includes many subsystems of different scales, such as organisations, communities, cultures, families, etc. (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a)

For a system to be able to adapt to change, it needs resilience. Resilience has been described in the literature as the ability of a system to sustain itself in times of change or shocks (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a 33). Folke et al. (2010) argue that it should also include the ability a system to adapt and transform. For the purpose of this thesis, this broader definition of resilience will be used.

Adaptive capacity is what allows a social system to be resilient. Missimer, Robèrt and Broman (2017a) describe 5 essential aspects of adaptive capacity of a social system: diversity, learning, self-organisation, trust and common-meaning:

- Diversity increases possibilities, which is necessary when one does not know what might happen in the future. Having many options increases the opportunity that one of those strategies helps to be resilient in case of change or shock. Diversity also adds different perspectives, which contributes to the knowledge and understanding of a system (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a).
- Learning refers to the ability of the individual to learn by him or herself and the ability of the system to learn as a whole. It enables a system to sense change and adapt to it effectively. (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017b 48).
- Self-organisation is the ability of a system to organise itself without “system level intent or centralized control” (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a 37). Self- Organisation is essential for individuals and systems to adapt quickly; with self-organisation decisions can be made without always needing to be approved by a top-down power structure.
- Trust is one of the main variables that creates value in social systems. “Trust is a key element of social life, in other social sciences - it is often termed the fabric, which binds society together” (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a 37). Without trust between various individuals, it is difficult or impossible to achieve collective learning, diversity and self-organisation in a system (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a)
- Common Meaning - Missimer, Robèrt and Broman (2017a, 37) state, “humans are a meaning- making and meaning-seeking species...this seems to be wired into our brains.” Without it, our brain “signals extreme discomfort and motivates the search for renewed purpose and hence meaning” (Kilinger 1998) When it comes to a social system it requires common meaning and a clear purpose in order to exist and thrive. A social system is a purposeful system (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017a).The first three aspects come from resilience of ecological systems, the other two are specific to social systems. When those 5 elements are present, a social system can more easily adhere to the 5 SSPs (Missimer, Robèrt and Broman 2017b)

### 1.4 Organisations, the Sustainability Challenge and Adaptive Capacity

Organisations can be defined as “a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals” (Business Dictionary 2017). Organisations include, but are not limited to, businesses, municipalities, charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

community groups and educational institutions.

Organisations can be understood as open systems, they affect and are affected by their environment. With reference to the sustainability challenge, organisations' variable collective goals and activities (i.e. their products and services) have impact on their direct and indirect surroundings (i.e. the complete biosphere, or parts of it) (Berns et al. 2009). These can be thought of as alignments or misalignments with the sustainability principles of the SSD. By enabling people to coordinate and work together on a common purpose, organisations enlarge their impact - positive or negative. Organisations, as defined above, have goals and impact that fit every niche and scale of the social system. The sustainability challenge, which has already reached, or nearly-reached, several tipping points, requires the coordinating ability of organisations to create positive impacts. This requires a change of focus for many existing organisations.

As well as the external impact of their goals and activities, organisational environments directly have a large, impact on their workforce. Time spent at work occupies a large percentage of an individual's time, and the relationships developed (or not-developed) at work directly impact on an individual's well-being. The 'social contract' supporting what is expected by employees and employers is continuously changing (Eisenberg et al. 2016)

In order to proactively make the changes that are necessary to move towards sustainability, and to be able to adapt to the inevitable, likely dramatic, effects of climate change, such as changes in weather, migration, etc. organisations need resilience (Linnenluecke and Griffiths 2010).

Organisations are one kind of social system, and as such the lens of adaptive capacity can strongly assist in thinking about their resilience. The 5 elements of AC can provide guidance for assessing the current level of resilience of an organisation, and for moving towards a more resilient future for an organisation. This academic notion of systems needing resilience is echoed in organisational/business discourse as it recognizes the need to be able to adapt to changing circumstances (Linnenluecke and Griffiths 2010).

## **1.5 Communication in Organisations**

Referring back to the definition above, organisations can be defined as "a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals" (Business Dictionary 2017). As this definition makes clear, organisations are a "social unit of people". Scholars go so far as to argue that 'organisations' in and of themselves do not exist. It can be said that organisations are a manifestation of communication and the meaning making it provides (Koschmann 2012). They are not tangible places, things or structures, but rather they are a manifestation of human relationships (Watson 2002). Communication is the basis for all forms of cooperation (Museux et al. 2016).

Communication in organisations has its own dynamics and dimensions. Conrad and Poole (Conrad and Poole 2002) identify 4 dimensions of organisational communication:

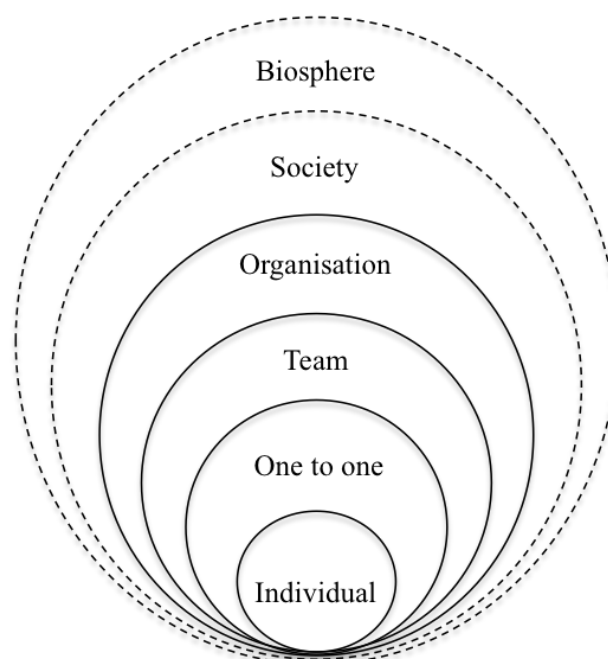
1. **Structured discourse:** this relates to and is influenced by the structure of the organisation. In the west, most organisations have a hierarchical structure. As a result, people communicate along the chain of command, with their direct supervisors, subordinates and direct colleagues.

2. Interpersonal discourse: besides the professional relationships amongst colleagues, people also develop personal relationships at work, hence relationships at work are blended relationships. The quality of work relationships is a strong predictor of overall job satisfaction.
3. Contextualized discourse: organisations exist within the context of society. People take assumptions from society into the workplace and vice versa.
4. Systemic discourse: “Organisational communication is *systemic* because it is simultaneously influenced by all the pressures that comprise an organisational system and is the key process through which those pressures, and the system, are maintained.” (Conrad and Poole 2002 24) Some of the processes through which the system is maintained are self-regulation, adaptation and self-renewal.

The first and fourth dimension can also be seen in the light of Giddens theory of structuration (Giddens 1984): the structure of an organisation impacts the communication that people have, and likewise, the communication between agents within an organisation influences the structure of the organisation.

Relationships in organisations are blended, and so is the content of communication. The literature identifies two purposes of communication in groups working towards a common goal: transactional/ task related communication to convey information and get the work done and psyche/relational related communication to define and express the relationships between participants (Koschmann 2012; Watzlawick, Bavelas, and Jackson 1980; Luft 1984).

Since humans are emotional beings, they bring feelings and needs with them to the work floor. Hence, psyche processes are necessary to enable task related processes. Sometimes it is difficult or even impossible to talk about psyche processes within a work setting (Luft 1984).



*Figure 1.1 Different levels at which communication takes place in a nested system*

Communication in organisations takes place on different levels. Firstly, individuals bring different communication patterns with them to the workplace. They use these on an

interpersonal level, on the level of teams and on the level of the whole organisation. Figure 1.1 shows how these levels are related as nested systems. The level of the individual is included and transcended by the interpersonal level, etc.

## 1.6 Communication challenges in organisations

As shown above, communication is an essential feature of organisations as manifestations of human relationships, taking many forms and influencing in many ways the structure of these organisations. This section will describe some challenges and dynamics which shape this communication. These are not intrinsically negative, or leading-to negative effects, but interact in complex ways where paying particular attention to one dynamic may result in neglecting another dynamic or vice versa.

First, before even taking the added complexity of relational aspects into account, there is much room for communication error in ‘simple’ information relay. General challenges of communication, according to Eisenberg et al. (2016), include a potential for message’s or circumstances to have:

1. Ambiguity – if the language used allows for multiple interpretations of the same information. For example caused by abstract language.
2. Information overload – if the quantity, speed or complexity of data makes it difficult to process the information.
3. Distortions by the environment – if the internal or external conditions makes it difficult for interpretation of information. For example, if physically there are competing stimuli or noises; or emotionally if the receiver is in a state which blocks their interpretation such as jealousy or grief.

These above points show how challenges exist between the sender and receiver in relaying ‘transactional’ information.

Furthermore, human and relational aspects of communication inform an additional, complex, world of intentional and unintentional meaning-making. These can create a barrier to shared understanding and interpretation. These interpretations are informed by personal moods and personal backgrounds, including culture (Eisenberg et al. 2016).

Even further complexity emerges when bringing human intentions and motives into the scenario. An individual can consider multiple, potentially conflicting, interpretations of a conversation and it’s context. Interpreting and communicating in multiple, complex, contexts is one of the hardest things we do in organisations. (Eisenberg et al. 2016).

The focus is often on the transactional part of the communication with more complex meaning making and relational aspects often not acknowledged. For example, Museux et al. (2016) show that communication training in the healthcare sector usually focuses on the way clinical information is shared and they do little to address the relational dimension to create authentic communication imbued with mutual trust.

We cannot be aware of all the factors that need to be navigated and considered regarding communication and interpretation in organisations. Many of those have been shown by psychological and sociological study to be embedded in our human nature. This is an extremely complex field, partly illustrated by the following selection of examples from the literature:

1. False consensus effect – where individuals or groups tend to see their own behavior as typical, affecting the accuracy of their assumptions about others and decision making. This can be impacted by a group or individual's tendency to seek feedback and check assumptions. (Jones and Roelofsma 2000)
2. Escalation of commitment – where individuals or groups continue to support a course of action or worldview, despite evidence that it is failing, due to social pressures and a desire to rationalise previous behavior (Jones and Roelofsma, 2000).
3. Variable participation in groups – affected by the personality of individuals and the assigned position of members in a team. Notably, this is affected by the encouragement/discouragement of participation by other team members and the communication style of the leader (Hedman and Valo 2015).
4. Jockeying for power – this can take the shape of one team member trying to hijack others, and has significant impact on communication competence of the team, sometimes destroying relationships among members (Hedman and Valo 2015).

Many of these communication dynamics result from different mental models and interpretation of reality, leading to misunderstanding. According to Eisenberg et al. (2016) being mindful of our communication and practicing empathy can allow us to see, understand and promote new possibilities in our relationships with other individuals and departments. Empathy and mindful communication make managing diversity and inclusion possible and provide a foundation for building trust and authenticity. In this way, we can focus on common problems without immediately turning those who have a different view on these problems against us.

## **1.7 Communication and adaptive capacity of organisations**

Since organisations (and social systems in general) critically depend on the communication between their members, the communication within an organisation will have an impact on its adaptive capacity. This section is a first exploration on how communication within organisations can relate to the 5 elements of adaptive capacity. Further connections will be explored later in this thesis.

**Diversity.** Communication, by enabling the spread of meaning-making and interpretation, has a large impact on how much an organisation is able to draw upon the potential benefits that diversity can bring, or whether it is able to work with diversity at all (Vangen 2017; Brett, Behfar, and Kern 2006).

**Learning.** The learning ability of an organisation depends on whether it is able to learn from the experience of its members and spread knowledge amongst its members. This communication does or does not take place through formal and/or informal communication structures (Koohborfardhaghighi, Lee, and Kim 2016).

**Trust.** Effective internal communication plays a vital role in creating trust amongst the employees of an organisation by being transparent, encouraging accountability and encouraging employee participation (Men and Stacks 2014).

**Common meaning.** For a common meaning, or vision, to be effective it must be created by multiple stakeholders within an organisation and communicated sufficiently and widely throughout an organisation (Kotter 2010). Without clear communication of a vision independent parts of the system pursue their own goals and the system can dissolve into

confusing and incompatible projects.

Self-organisation. Decision making is a fundamental need of self-organisation. Problems related to decision making in organisations include lack of clarity in communication and the absence of communication that would otherwise allow for participation in joint decision making (i.e whether a whole team makes a decision, just the leader, or a smaller group within the team) (Hedman and Valo 2015).

In conclusion, communication in organisations is deeply connected to and impacts on adaptive capacity.

Communication is complex, and an individual's patterns of communication and interpretation are learnt from their different backgrounds. Therefore communication in an organisation is hugely variable and it is dependent on the random mix of communication styles that employees bring in. There is no guarantee that this mix of communication styles of employees set them up well to be able to navigate the communication challenges and dynamics in a way that contribute to AC.

The question is whether there is a way of communication that can be learned by employees to help them to mindfully, empathically and strategically navigate communication dynamics in organisations, and, in addition, whether this could support the adaptive capacity of an organisation? Nonviolent Communication is a model for communication that practitioners claim holds this potential to help individuals and organisations effectively navigate communication dynamics and thereby may in turn offer support for adaptive capacity of organisations.

## 1.8 Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a language and model designed by Marshall Rosenberg. Rosenberg developed the model of NVC by drawing on the work of cognitive therapist Albert Ellis and psychologist Carl Rogers (Beck 2005). It is an approach which aims to promote connection to ourselves and others. It aims to create relationships where mutual growth can occur by drawing upon universal needs rather than forms of connection, which promote fear, guilt or shame through judgments (Beck 2005; Rosenberg 2003). According to Rosenberg (2003, 52): "Judgments of others are alienated expressions of our own unmet needs". The aim of NVC is to move from a language of judgments to a language of needs.

Most trainees find that it takes years of practice to obtain proficiency in NVC (Beck 2005). However, the model itself is simple to teach and practice and consists of the following 4 steps (Rosenberg 2003):

1. **Observing without evaluation:** NVC does not mandate that we remain completely objective and refrain from evaluating. It requires that we maintain a separation between our observations and our evaluations or judgments. The first step is to formulate an observation of the situation that is free from evaluation.
2. **Identifying feelings:** The next step is to identify the feelings one feels when thinking of the observed situation.
3. **Identifying needs:** The feelings experienced come from certain needs that are either being met or unmet. This step is about identifying those connected needs and trying to describe them as specifically as possible.



4. **Formulating a request:** The last step is to formulate a request based on the first three steps. This request should be clear, positive and hold a concrete action. The requester should be open to receive a “no” and then find other creative strategies that can fulfil his or her needs.

These 4 steps can be used in 3 distinct ways: (1) to express one’s feelings and needs, (2) to listen to the feelings and needs of another person, and (3) to listen to one’s own feelings and needs, through self-connection.

Transcending the model’s 4 steps and 3 ways of using NVC, is the desired cultivation of empathy and empathic listening, and developing relevant intention and attention (Museux et al. 2016). The intention must be to connect compassionately to other human beings (and oneself) before blaming, correcting, educating or using other forms of communication that are not connecting (Lee et al. 1998; Rosenberg 2003). Without this intention and attention, NVC will not be effective (Rosenberg 2003).

NVC is built upon a particular worldview, and although grounded in psychological research, the following are some underpinning assumptions behind the model:

- Everybody is responsible for his or her own feelings. These feelings can be triggered by environments or what someone else does, but you are responsible for how you react to those triggers.
- These feelings are an indicator of met or unmet needs.
- Judgments are an expression of unmet needs.
- Needs themselves are of a finite number and are universal.
- There are many ways to fulfill a need, if a person cannot help you fulfill a need, you can try to find a different strategy.
- However, if you request specifically what you want, you are more likely to get your needs met. Regarding the request there is a difference between a request, of which the requester is able to receive a ‘no’, and a demand, where there is no option to disagree.

There are several tools that aid the learning of NVC. The main ones being lists of feelings and needs that help trainees enlarge their vocabulary (see Appendices A and B respectively for examples), a jackal puppet, which represents the language of judgments, and a giraffe puppet that represents the language of empathy.

#### *Application of Nonviolent Communication*

Beck (2005), shows through neuroscience and other objective analysis that NVC is of most value when considered as more than a model, but rather as a tool to enable a shift in consciousness. He goes as far as to say that getting caught up in the technique of the 4 steps may even cause rigidity and get in the way of connecting. Beck, believes that NVC must become a part of the implicit process of language, rather than a set of rules. He shows that many experienced trainers adapt the 4 steps, while still emphasising the needs based approach for connection and the communication of strategies and requests, thereby overcoming rigidity. Beck continues by stating that the emphasis on personal responsibility for feelings and needs brings into question the suitability of NVC for adoption by the whole population (Rosenberg in Beck 2005).

However, the literature evidence shows that whichever exact elements and processes of NVC are used by trainers and practitioners its emphasis on needs can give clarity and connection in many situations. It aims at handling socio-emotionally demanding situations, including conflict

(Lee et al. 1998) and can help resolve the complex gender and cultural challenges of the day (Beck 2005).

Relating to communication theories outlined above, Rosenberg claims that 80% of communication is empathic and all communication carries a request for connection or action (Rosenberg in Beck 2005). NVC provides: “a way of translating back and forth between the information part of the communication (contained in the ‘observation’ and ‘request’ parts of NVC) and the affective part (contained in the ‘feelings’ and ‘needs’ parts of NVC)” (Cox and Dannahy 2005). Interpreting this in light of the communication theories outlined above, it could be said that NVC translates/bridges between the transactional and relational elements of communication.

There are over 150 certified NVC trainers worldwide (Beck 2005; CNVC 2017), who aid individuals and organisations in their learning of NVC. NVC is widely used in education, healthcare and other sectors. How it is currently used in organisations will be further explored in the following section.

## **1.9 Nonviolent Communication in organisations**

The number of academic publications on the use of NVC in organisations is very and the literature that is written mainly relates to the use of NVC in health care and (peace) education. A search in Scopus with the term “Nonviolent Communication” (on 02-05-2017) provides 21 hits. Those articles are related to the use of NVC in healthcare (8), peace education (4), education in general (2), kindergartens (2), religious studies (2) a prison (1) and mediation (1). One article was published twice. These findings are in line with Lee et al. (1998), who find that the majority of organisations in which NVC is being used have been where a relational aspect is central such as organisations providing care and education. In most of those organisations, NVC is used to communicate more effectively with clients or students. Only a few of the articles about NVC in healthcare organisations refer to better team performance as a reason to implement NVC.

As discussed above internal communication in organisations is fundamental and complex with many dynamics. NVC has the potential to contribute to a way of dealing with those dynamics that is beneficial for the organisation. For example, NVC’s emphasis on openness, authenticity and operating from needs can build deep, meaningful and productive relationships faster (Cox and Dannahy 2005). Museux et al. (2016) show that NVC revealed improvements in “[...] individual competency in client/family-centered collaboration and role clarification. Improvements in group competency were also found with respect to teams’ ability to develop a shared plan of action” (Abstract). Furthermore, NVC’s focus on concise formulation of communication and the shared language it provides (Museux et al. 2016), can lessen the amount of ambiguity that is often experienced in communication.

A new dynamic with regards to communication in modern organisations is e-communication, where the lack of non-verbal cues, anonymity and other challenges enhance the emphasis on the transactional nature of relationships. Cox & Dannahy (2005) found that NVC’s robust model and intentional disclosure can help make e-communication more effective and supports building mentoring relationships. Potentially NVC also has this effect on other e-communication.

Some people use NVC to not only look at the needs of the people working in an organisation, but to look at the needs of the organisation as a whole. (Miyashiro and Rosenberg, 2007) Identify 6 needs of organisations that need to be taken into account when aiming for the sustainability of an organisation. These needs are identity, life affirming purpose, direction, energy, expression and purpose. The process of working on the needs of an organisation is supported by the use of NVC by individuals in the organisation.

It becomes clear that NVC can be used in many different ways by organisations. To enhance external communication with clients, to enhance internal communication among colleagues or between management and subordinates, and to support the needs of the organisation as a whole. This research specifically aims at finding out how the use of NVC for internal communication in organisations can affect communication dynamics in a way that supports the AC of an organisation.

## **1.10 Research purpose**

This research was undertaken to develop an understanding of how internal communication dynamics of an organisation might influence its adaptive capacity and thereby its resilience to change. Specifically, the effects of one tool for communication, NVC, were explored.

The intended audiences come from three likely communities.

1. Specific organisations who are using NVC for internal communication, or are interested in applying NVC in their organisation, and would gain added value by interpreting NVC's potential benefits through the lens of adaptive capacity and resilience.
2. Those who are concerned with the adaptive capacity of organisations in general. Particularly those familiar with and/or practice the application of SSD. These include researchers and those working at the international organisation 'The Natural Step'.
3. Finally, by providing a systems thinking approach we hope to be of interest to the extensive international NVC practitioner community, to inform the debate about how NVC can create systemic change.

## **1.11 Research Questions**

To identify how NVC might contribute to social sustainability through adaptive capacity, the following main research question (MRQ) has been formulated:

*How does Nonviolent Communication support the adaptive capacity of organisations?*

Five sub-research questions (SRQs) have been formulated to help answer this question:

- A. What communication dynamics are commonly present in organisations?
- B. How might communication dynamics influence the adaptive capacity of an organisation?
- C. How has Nonviolent Communication been introduced and how is it practiced in the sample organisations?
- D. Are the identified communication dynamics present in the sample organisations?
- E. What are the effects of Nonviolent Communication on communication dynamics in organisations?

## **1.12 Research scope**

Due to NVC being a model for interpersonal communication the researchers decided to focus on the experiences of individual actors within organisations. Their experiences will be used to explore the effects of NVC on a system level.

When selecting organisations to examine, the short time scale and the fact that it is unknown how many organisations are using NVC, a pragmatic approach with regards to the scope of this research was required. Due to existing networks, the Netherlands became the focus of selecting organisations. Data was gathered with small and medium organisations who had been using NVC in their daily practices for more than 4 months.

To gain connection with certified NVC trainers, trainers based in Northern Europe were approached via the Centre of Nonviolent Communication (CNVC).

## 2 Research Design and Methodology

### 2.1 Overview of the research process

This research followed Maxwell's (2013) "interactive" research design, where the phases of the research design influence each other in a continuous development process. Since NVC is a specific type of communication that operates primarily at the interpersonal level of the organisational system, and adaptive capacity (AC) is made up of a set of elements present at the level of the whole organisation, to be able to answer the main research question '*How does Nonviolent Communication support the adaptive capacity of organisations?*', an intermediary form of communication, relevant to organisations, was needed to enable the relationship between NVC and AC to be explored. It was decided to use communication dynamics (CDs) in organisations as an intermediary bridge between NVC and AC (see figure 2.1).

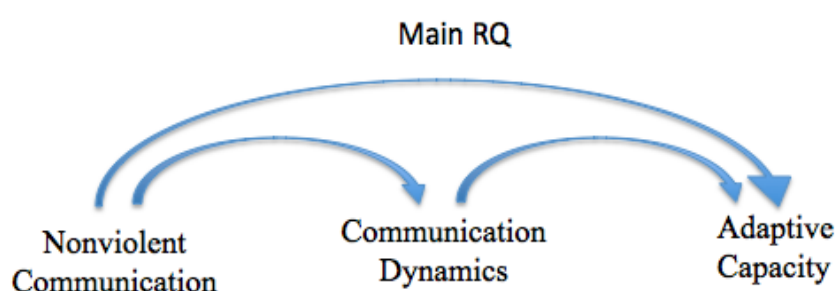


Figure 2.1. The use of communication dynamics as intermediary between NVC and AC

Sub research questions (SRQs) were designed to investigate the different links between NVC, CDs and AC, outlined above. Figure 2.2 displays the flow between the different SRQs. Phase 1 of the research focused on identifying communication dynamics in organisations (SRQ A) and how these CDs might influence AC (SRQ B). In phase 2 sample organisations who use NVC internally were selected and the aim was to get clarity on how NVC was implemented and is being practiced within these organisations (SRQ C). This phase also focused on finding out whether the found CDs of phase 1 are present in the sample organisations (SRQ D). The aim of phase 3 was to find out what the effects of NVC are on the communication dynamics in organisations (SRQ E). The discussion will tie all the results together and aims to answer the main research question.

In each phase, different research methods were employed to inform a possible answer to the SRQs. In phase 1, a literature review was used to identify common communication dynamics in organisations. Furthermore, the possible influence of those CDs on the AC of an organisation was explored through a process expert inquiry and judgement. This formed the outline of the conceptual framework that was used in later phases.

To select sample organisations and to answer SRQs C and D in phase 2, semi-structured interviews and a survey with an organisational representatives were used to confirm suitability of organisation and gain an understanding of how NVC and communication dynamics are present in the sample organisations.

Phase 3 of the research was designed to answer SRQ E. A survey amongst employees who were

trained in NVC in the sample organisations, semi-structured follow up interviews with 1 or 2 of those employees and semi-structured interviews with certified NVC trainers were used to gain understanding on the effects of NVC on the organisational communication dynamics identified in the previous phases. See table 2.1 for an overview of the different research methods used for each SRQ.

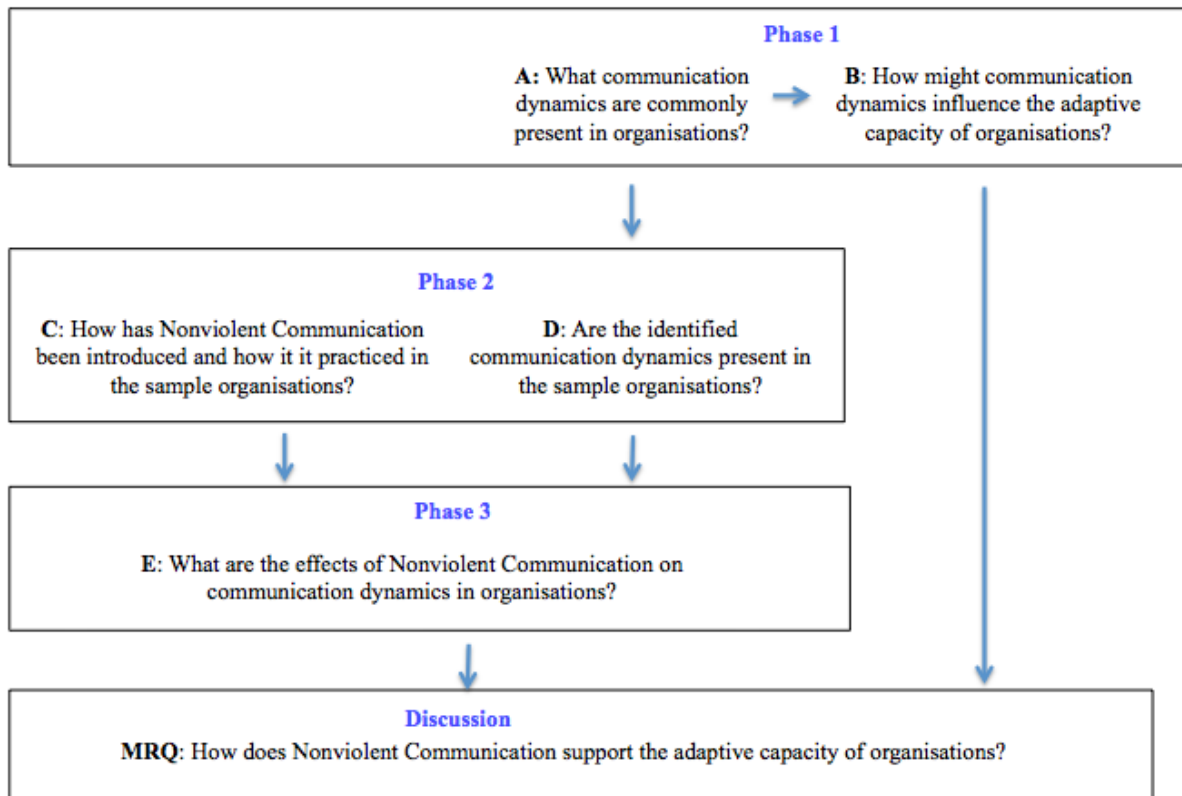


Figure 2.2. The SRQs and their relationships to each other and the main RQ

Table 2.1. Overview of research methods per SRQ

Research method and Sample	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3
	SRQ A	SRQ B	SRQ C	SRQ D	SRQ E
Literature review	✓	✓			
Preliminary semi-structured interviews with organisational representatives			✓	✓	
Survey amongst organisational representatives			✓	✓	
Survey amongst employees					✓
Semi-structured interviews with employees					✓
Semi-structured interviews with NVC trainers					✓

This chapter is structured to follow the 3 phases of our research in order. A brief ‘why’ for the need of each phase is outlined, related to the main RQ and to the other phases. This is followed by a description of the research methods that were used in each phase.

## 2.2 Research methods phase 1 – Conceptual Framework

The goal of this phase was to answer SRQs A and B, to gain understanding on two of the main areas associated with our research question – communication dynamics in organisations; and the relation of those communication dynamics to adaptive capacity. This understanding would allow the development of a conceptual framework for use in the design of subsequent research phases.

### 2.2.1 Research methods SRQ A - What communication dynamics are commonly present in organisations?

To be able to relate the use of NVC, which is a method used for communication between individuals, to the adaptive capacity of an organisation, which is a feature of the organisation as a system, an intermediary step was needed. The goal of this phase was to find communication dynamics that individuals can relate their use of NVC to, and that can also be connected to the five elements of adaptive capacity of an organisation.

#### *Literature review*

To be able to identify communication dynamics, general literature on communication in organisations and in working teams, as well as literature specific to challenges was read to gain a better understanding. Challenges were renamed and treated as ‘communication dynamics’ to reflect the fact that communication is complex, operating across many levels and does not solely have a negative or positive influence.

#### *Sample selection*

Literature was found through searches on Scopus and the BTH academic library. The sample consisted of 5 peer-reviewed articles and 3 books on organisational communication.

#### *Data collection*

The specific communication dynamics in this literature were collected through a process of emergent coding. Beyond the high level codes of ‘communication challenge’ or ‘communication dynamic’, there were no other pre-determined codes used for this selection process, since the authors did not want to exclude any potential dynamics. Each researcher recorded dynamics they had found, with quotes and page numbers noted, to be reviewed by the other researchers. All dynamics found were then reviewed together for their practical application to the study with reference to the nested systems present in organisations (i.e. one to one, team, and organisation wide communications). In total 35 challenges were identified.

#### *Analysis and synthesis*

The specific challenges were categorized to result in the final dynamics which would be used in this study. The categorizing and selecting followed the following process:

1. All 35 of the dynamics and challenges found were written out on post-it notes, with overlapping dynamics discarded.
2. The dynamics were discussed by the research team and clustered according to related topic areas, including but not limited to nested level of an organisation they affected.
3. The common theme within these clusters were identified and labelled. In total 9 themes were found and became the communication dynamics used for this study.
4. Working definitions for each dynamic drawing on the discussion’s rationale were

drafted.

### **2.2.2 Research methods SRQ B - How might communication dynamics influence the adaptive capacity of organisations?**

This phase provided an expansion of our conceptual framework to explicitly include adaptive capacity. The goal of this phase was to produce an ‘adaptive capacity/communications dynamic map’ upon which to place findings from later phases of our research. By placing data related to NVC’s impact on the CDs, onto this map the researchers will explore NVCs relationship to AC and draw conclusions to inform the discussion of the primary RQ.

#### *Data Collection*

Two sets of data were needed. Firstly the definitions of each communication dynamic, established in SRQ A. Secondly, a set of data had to relate to adaptive capacity. A literature review of adaptive capacity drew primarily on Missimer et al (2017a; 2017b). This review provided definitions of the elements of adaptive capacity and any factors which positively or negatively contributed to each element.

#### *Analysis*

To answer SRQ B a cross table was created connecting each communication dynamic to each element of adaptive capacity. Each researcher asked “How does X CD impact on X element of AC?” and mapped conclusions as to how elements of adaptive capacity were positively or negatively affected, if at all. Key relationships, having particularly large impacts were highlighted. Each element was treated in isolation although it was noted where relationships might overlap. The research team then reviewed their answers looking for similarities and differences and collated these answers together. The grid was sent to an expert in adaptive capacity for validation and input. The researchers subsequently interviewed the expert then re-reviewed the relationships.

## **2.3 Research Methods Phase 2 - Nonviolent Communication and Communication Dynamics in the sample organisations**

The goal of this phase was to find organisations that internally use NVC in their daily operations. Data would be gathered in these sample organisations during this, and later phases of the research. In this phase the aim was to understand how NVC and common communication dynamics are present in these organisations (SRQs C and D). Data was gathered from one representative from each sample organisation via a semi-structured interview and a digital survey.

### **2.3.1 Sample selection**

The following criteria were used to select sample organisations:

- The organisation needs to use NVC internally for daily operations.
- Employees should have at least 4 months of experience with using NVC within the organisation.
- The contact person needs to be willing to send out the employee survey to employees



who have been trained in NVC.

To find case study organisations for this research, trainers on the list of CNVC and NVC practitioners from one of the researcher's own network were contacted to ask for an introduction to organisations which used NVC in their internal operations. They named several organisations, providing contact details of organisational representatives familiar with NVC's historical and current context in the organisation. Organisations named included: a school, a bank, a weather institute, a municipality, a large international retailer and 3 NGO's. The contact person for each organisation was contacted.

5 organisations replied and their contexts were examined using the methods described below. Following the selection criteria above, 3 organisations were finally selected to participate in the study and are described below. The organisational representative from each organisation served to act as both a contact person and research subject.

**School:** Located on the edge of a city in the Netherlands, this school was founded by parents in 2015. The school is small with 40 pupils who range in age from 4-18. The school requires fees to be paid per pupil and has been founded as a 'democratic school' with NVC used from the beginning. It employs 8 members of staff.

**Research Institute:** Located in the Netherlands, this organisation was formally government managed. The institute produces regular research of public, non-political, interest. It employs approximately 400 members of staff.

**NGO:** Located in the Netherlands, but managing contracts overseas. Its work is concerned with disease prevention and health and wellbeing in the developing world (primarily Africa). The organisation is well established and employs approximately 140 members of staff directly, as well as others on contract.

### **2.3.2 Research methods SRQ C - How has Nonviolent Communication been introduced and how is it practiced in the sample organisations? and D - Are the identified communication dynamics present in the sample organisations?**

#### *Semi structured interviews*

The interviews of a single representative at each organisation contained questions to get a better understanding of why each organisation decided to implement NVC and how it is implemented now. The interviews also explored other contextual matters relevant to our study such as the organisation's structure, product and goals. The semi-structured interviews took place via Skype or Zoom, were recorded and notes were made during the interview. They lasted between 40 to 60 minutes.

#### *Survey*

Each organisational contact person interviewed filled in a digital survey, with an additional representative of the Research Institute also filling in the survey. This survey contained qualitative questions to support the interview answers and explain the context of NVC in the organisation.

Additionally questions were asked about communication dynamics present in the organisations. An initial, open, qualitative question asked to identify 3 communication dynamics present in

their organisation. This was to help verify the research in the first research phase and highlight key focus areas. Following this was a series of quantitative questions on the specific communication dynamics identified in phase 1 and their presence in the organisations. Each dynamic was ranked on from +1 (not a challenge) to +5 (a major challenge). This served to confirm that the dynamics identified in phase 1 were relevant and to be able to compare the context across the sample organisations.

### *Analysis*

Recorded interviews and surveys were reviewed and coded for key information relating to context of NVC and communications dynamics were noted per organisation. Quantitative data from the survey was analysed using a graph so that they were easily comparable. As the research institute had two respondents to this survey the mean was calculated.

## **2.4 Research Methods Phase 3 – Effects of Nonviolent Communication on Communication Dynamics in organisations**

### **2.4.1 Research methods SRQ E – What are the effects of Nonviolent Communication on communication dynamics in organisations?**

The goal of this phase was to answer SRQ E by exploring the experience of 2 groups of people with regards to practicing NVC and its effects on communication dynamics in organisations. These 2 groups were: NVC trainers and employees at organisations practicing NVC. The 2 groups were examined as their answers were expected to overlap and provide valuable perspective to each other.

Employees experiences would be received with quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will allow the statistical exploration of the correlation between practicing NVC and perceived positive/negative influence on communication dynamics. Qualitative data from employees and trainers would help clarify the quantitative data and start exploring ‘how’ NVC impacts (e.g. via particular component’s relationship to particular communication dynamics).

### **2.4.2 Semi-structured interviews with NVC trainers**

#### *Sample selection*

To find experienced NVC trainers, the researchers reached out to certified NVC trainers via the Centre for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC). CNVC is the global organisation which “acts as a nexus point for NVC related information and resources, including training . . . and certification” (CNVC 2017). By emailing a selection of more than 50 certified NVC trainers, from countries surrounding Sweden. 5 responses were received, 2 positive, 2 negative, and one referring to another person who is currently in the process of getting certified. The two trainers and the person who is in the process of getting certified were interviewed, as all of them were considered to have enough experience with NVC to bring valuable insights. Also the researchers reached out to Marie Miyashiro, author of the ‘Empathy Factor’ and a chapter on Integrated clarity co-written with Marshall Rosenberg in the Change Handbook. She was interviewed as well. Appendix C shows an overview of the trainers who were interviewed and their experience with NVC. For practical reasons, the interviews with the 3 NVC trainers took

place before the survey amongst employees was sent out. The interview with Marie Miyashiro took place after the data from the survey was gathered.

#### *Data collection*

The themes, relating to NVC, identified through the literature review were used to draft semi-structured interviews. An extract of the questions for the semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix D. The focus of the interview was to better understand which ‘components’ were most of essence for practicing NVC and especially of relevance for use in organisations. Some of the interview focus also explored the ‘necessary contexts’ and ‘possible effects’ of practicing NVC. The semi-structured interviews took place via Skype or Zoom, were recorded and notes were made during the interview. They lasted between 50 to 70 minutes.

#### *Analysis*

After the employee survey was coded, the recordings of the interviews were listened to and the notes made during the interview were revisited, looking for the same themes that emerged from the coding of the employee survey. These themes were ‘NVC components’, ‘NVC context/setting’ and ‘possible effects of NVC’. Quotes referring to those themes were transcribed. Quotes referring to other themes that emerged were also transcribed. Illustrative quotes are presented in the results section of this phase.

### **2.4.3 Employee Survey**

#### *Sample selection*

The sample size was approximately 100 employees, all trained in NVC, from the 3 sample organisations. In total, 40 employees responded to the survey. 25 employees responded from the NGO, 7 from Research Institute and 8 from the School. Out of a total of 60, 35 and 8 total trained employees in each organisation respectively.

#### *Data collection*

The conceptual framework derived from phase 1 and the results of phase 2 were used to design a survey structure which would best suit our research question and our research audience. Sample questions can be found in Appendix E.

This survey was designed to last approximately 10 to 15 minutes and be distributed via the organisational representative to employees. The survey was tested for clarity and research suitability upon personal contacts familiar with the NVC methodology, and selected NVC practitioners, before being sent to its wider audience. The survey was translated to Dutch, so that respondents had the option to fill it in either in Dutch or in English.

The survey contained two questions for each of the 8 communication dynamics. The first question was to gather quantitative data and asked the respondent ‘Please rate how, if at all, NVC influences the communication challenges related to ‘[insert communication dynamic]’ in your organisation?’ Respondents could choose the options ‘NVC has a very positive/positive/no effect/negative/very negative effect on this’, or ‘I have no experience with NVC in this situation.’

The second question for each CD was optional, and designed to gather qualitative data to get a sense of what specific effects NVC has on the CDs. It read: ‘Expanding on your selection above, can you share one short example about a time when NVC did, or did not, contribute towards

dealing with this communication dynamic within your organisation?’

A final question asked the respondent whether her or she was willing to help with a follow up interview of about 30 minutes through Skype or phone.

### *Analysis*

The replies to the first question of the survey were translated into quantitative data as follows: very positive effect = 2, positive effect = 1, no effect = 0, negative effect = -1, very negative effect = -2. The ‘I have no experience’ option was not translated.

This quantitative data was used to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each communication dynamic, per organisation and in total. The people who responded that they had no experience were not included when calculating the mean score for each dynamic. The results are in figure 3.2 in the results section of this phase.

The qualitative replies to the second question in section two were first translated to English and then coded according to the following process:

1. Each author of this thesis separately coded for NVC elements and emerging themes.
2. The authors gathered and categorized the emerging themes into ‘effects of NVC’ and ‘context in which NVC’ is used.
3. A second round of separate coding followed.
4. The final sub-codes per theme were decided upon and a final round of coding was performed according to the coding structure in Appendix F.

The codes were counted per communication dynamic and per organisation. The results are presented in the results section of this phase.

## **2.4.5 Semi-structured interviews with employees**

### *Sample selection*

A final question of the employee survey asked whether respondents were willing to be interviewed to aid our analysis, and if ‘yes’ to provide an email address. All people who opted to be interviewed were interviewed, in total 4 employees, 2 from the school and one from each of the other sample organisations.

### *Data collection*

The interviews each lasted approximately 30 minutes and were semi-structured, conducted via Skype or phone. Interviews were recorded after permission was sought. Questions, informed by emerging themes in our codes, were prepared specifically for each organisation. Questions primarily explored codes related to ‘NVC context/setting’ and ‘Components of NVC used’. Sample questions can be found in Appendix G.

### *Analysis*

Notes were made during the interviews and recordings were reviewed in line with the coding structure already established from the survey. Key quotes which were relevant to these codes were transcribed verbatim and reviewed by the research team. Illustrative quotes can be found in the results section of this phase.

## 2.5 Validity

SRQ A was not an exhaustive research into communication in organisations and this was not its intention. It is likely that many more communication dynamics (CDs) could be found and explored, and some which are more worthy of study. The aim, however, was to find areas of communication which literature supported as being significant, and could act as an intermediary between NVC and AC. Checking suitability and presence of CDs with organisational representatives prior to releasing the employee survey was a way to make the choice of CDs more valid. The categories chosen were not ‘distinct and non-overlapping’ with one dynamic likely to influence other dynamics and/or falling under different system levels.

SRQ B was explored with literature and logic assessment by the researchers, however the concept of AC of a social system is still relatively young and no research is known to specifically study the influence of communication on AC. This was a first exploration and the researchers sought to make it more valid by passing it by an expert on AC. More research is needed to clarify the impact of organisational communication on the adaptive capacity of organisations.

The results for SRQs C and D, which sought to gain understanding of NVC and communications in our sample organisations, were based on the perception and experience of one person per organisation (two people for the ‘Research Institute’). However, these individuals were employed in a role which allowed them insight across the organisation and their answers provided the researchers with a bit more understanding of the sample organisations.

SRQ E used data gathered by interviews with NVC trainers and by interview and a survey amongst employees from the three sample organisations.

- Regarding interviews with NVC trainers: the sample selection of NVC trainers was potentially biased, as trainers self-selected in response to an invitation.
- Regarding the survey amongst employees:
  - Communication dynamics were each given a short definition to ensure that interpretation was as similar as possible across employees. Effort was made to communicate the communication dynamics and their definitions in a way as to not lead respondents and their views of NVC. However, some phrases were not completely neutral, for example “resolving” interpersonal conflict. This could have influenced their responses.
  - All employees in interviews and samples were reassured of their anonymity but this does not guarantee that their responses were not influenced by the future disclosure of research results.
- Codes used were not completely mutually exclusive leading to potential for coding of answers in a way which was not representative. This was attempted to be controlled by each research team member coding data independently before returning together to discuss anomalies. The researchers are aware that codes could have been improved if given more time.
- Although this research question is targeted at ‘organisations’ it is not intended that generalisations and conclusions related to ‘all organisations’ be made from the small sample of organisations in this research. However, it is worth noting that the 3 sample organisations are from very different industries and scales of operation.

## 2.6 Limitations

Timeframe served as major limiting factor in our research, with the process having to adhere to strict deadlines. This impacted upon the following:

- The organisational representative survey was used to check suitability of our communication dynamics and a decision was made to remove the dynamic ‘Blended Relationships’ following the response of 3 organisations (the Research Institute, the NGO and a third which did not meet the sample criteria). When the organisational representative of the School replied this dynamic seemed to be the most pressing CD in that organisation, which means that it should not have been taken out of the survey. This CD should be included in further research.
- Analysis could have been richer if we had more time. Areas of data which were not analysed included cross coding, for example NVC element codes could have been cross coded with NVC effect codes. Additionally, analysis of a primary survey question indicating employees self-defined understanding of NVC could have been cross-checked with their responses and their perceived effects of NVC.
- Time was also a factor for our survey respondents. Organisational representatives advised that surveys take no more than 10-15 minutes, this restricted us in the amount of questions we could ask.

A limited sample size also impacted upon our research. Although aware of additional organisations which used NVC and which suited our sample criteria, we were dependent on the willingness of organisational representatives for selection. Our sample organisations all were located in the Netherlands, as the network of one of the authors is located there.

The sample organisations each came from a specific type of industry. It is unknown what the effects of NVC can be at other scales and forms of organisations such as commercial businesses where communication dynamics may manifest and be emphasised differently.

Also regarding sample size, employees at sample organisations have different understandings of NVC and were trained in different moments in time. This research did not receive input from non-NVC trained employees on their views.

## 2.7 Assumptions and biases

Qualitative research is subjective and interpretation and analysis of the results are likely informed by the backgrounds of the researchers. The three researchers vary in terms of past work and study experience with backgrounds in charities and the ‘3rd sector’; business and real estate management; and sustainability studies. Home countries also vary with researchers coming from the UK, Netherlands and China. This variation in backgrounds allowed for rich discussion and helped limit ‘groupthink’.

One researcher has completed a year course in NVC but the two other researchers had no pre-existing knowledge of NVC. This combination allowed for a good balance of informed background knowledge and fresh-eyed exploration.

### 3. Results

Our main research question was approached via 5 sub-research questions which fit under 3 research phases. In this chapter the results that were obtained are presented per phase and per SRQ. The results are presented in a format which best suits the data obtained for that SRQ.

- SRQ A, phase 1, was explored via a literature review and a categorization process, and the communication dynamics (CDs) used in this research are presented here. Further details on references can be found in Appendix H.
- SRQ B, phase 1, was completed by reviewing adaptive capacity literature and connecting this to the CDs. A selection of the research is presented here with further explanation in Appendix I.
- SRQ C, phase 2, was explored by interview and survey to understand NVCs implementation in the sample organisations. The data is presented per organisation.
- SRQ D, phase 2, was explored by a survey to understand the presence of the CDs in the sample organisations and the data is presented in a graph, per CD.
- SRQ E, phase 3, was explored by a survey and interviews with employees and interviews with NVC trainers to explore the relationship of NVC to the CDs. Quantitative data from the survey is presented in a graph, with description of supporting codes and illustrative quotes from interviews. Further data is available in Appendices J, K and L.

#### 3.1 Results phase 1 - Conceptual Framework

The intention for this phase was to develop a conceptual framework of common communication dynamics (SRQ A) and examine their potential relationship to adaptive capacity (SRQ B). Both of these would be used for later phases.

##### 3.1.1 Results for SRQ A - What communication dynamics are commonly present in organisations?

Following a literature review of potential issues related to organisational communication and a categorizing process, 35 communication challenges and dynamics were turned into 9 communication dynamics (CDs) suitable for use in this study. These 9 CDs are presented with their definitions in table 3.1 below. Between brackets is the name that is used to refer to each CD throughout the rest of this thesis. A full list of the 35 communication challenges and dynamics found, with literature references and their relationship to this studies working categories of CDs, can be found in Appendix H.

*Table 3.1. Identified communication dynamics in organisations*

<b>Communication Dynamic (Shortened name to be used in the rest of this thesis)</b>	<b>Description</b>
Working together within a diverse staff team (Working in a diverse team)	Teams require shared understanding to work together effectively. This shared understanding can be difficult to achieve with diversity informing viewpoints within groups. Diversity includes but is not limited to ages, languages, genders, backgrounds, religions, working

	styles and expertise.
Giving and receiving constructive feedback (Giving and receiving feedback)	Managers or team members give and receive feedback, in formal and informal settings, to improve one's work or working environment. The ability to give and receive this feedback constructively varies.
Effective use of Information Communication Technology (Effective use of ICT)	ICT, (e.g. email) has created new options for communication which bring its own possibilities and challenges. E.g. due to lack of face-to-face contact, it can create feelings of disconnection.
Team decision making (Team decision making)	In order to make well-informed decisions, it is important to create a space for all voices within a team to be heard in a way which supports the decision making process.
Space for sharing feelings and being open in the workplace (Sharing feelings in the workplace)	Humans are emotional beings, affected by circumstances inside and outside of work. Work environments can, intentionally or unintentionally, affect the amount of space available for the expression of human's emotional states.
Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation (Different levels of power)	Interactions and language used between different positions in an organisation are influenced by the different levels of power that come with those positions.
Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments (Internal competition)	Internal competition, for example, for positions, resources, budget or information can lead to members of an organisation using language and relationships in a strategic way.
Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict (Navigating interpersonal conflict)	Conflict existing between individuals can be either explicit or implicit. We also consider tension experienced due to subliminal and unspoken conflicts as conflict.
Navigating the professional / informal relationship line (Blended relationships)	Work relationships often have many dimensions at the same time, e.g. friend and manager or mentor and colleague, navigating communication in a way that is suitable to different relationship types simultaneously can be a challenge.

### 3.1.2 Results for SRQ B - How might communication dynamics influence the adaptive capacity of organisations?

The research team, with the assistance of an adaptive capacity expert, mapped the likely relationships of each communication dynamic's impact on each element of adaptive capacity. The full descriptions of these relationships are displayed in Appendix I. For each relationship named in Appendix I a + (positive), - (negative) or +/- (both) is attached. Please note that these + or - relationships are a guide only and primarily to help the researchers interpret the data. Regarding + or - relationships as absolute is problematic, as the phrasing of the dynamics in themselves is somewhat open to interpretation with some being phrased and/or defined in an intrinsically positive or negative way. This section of the results presents each element of AC with a suggested relationship of two communications dynamics, each communication dynamic is presented at least once.

Diversity: Diversity is important for a system to ensure 'as many options as possible'



(Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a) are available in the face of uncertainty. ‘Navigating interpersonal conflict’ improves diversity by allowing for any conflict which arises from diversity to be resolved and therefore allowing more voices to be heard. ‘Team decision making’ can occur in many formats, the format determines if or how different voices are heard, a format where more voices to be heard diversity increases.

**Common meaning:** The search for meaning is wired into our brains, a clear common meaning allows for the navigation of, and response to, complexity (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a). ‘Working with diverse teams’ can create a challenge to common meaning as diversity makes it harder to identify and hold shared understanding. ‘Navigating interpersonal conflict’ allows for better holding of the common meaning, as in times of conflict people may not wish to work towards the same purpose.

**Trust:** Trust acts as system glue and is developed by seeing others competence, motivations of benevolence and integrity or being known and feeling liked or significant (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a). ‘Giving and receiving feedback’ can increase trust as people gain a better sense of each other’s competencies and significance in the other’s eyes, however, if feedback is false or expressed as blame trust may decrease. ‘Sharing feelings in the workplace’ allows for transparency in seeing another person and gain insight into some of their motivations, this increases trust.

**Learning:** Learning as a system requires the system to build on social memory and experience to sense and respond to changes (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a). ‘Giving and receiving feedback’ is essential for testing an individual’s (or system’s) response and it’s suitability for the situation, allowing the responses to adapt over time. ‘Internal competition’ between members of a system can positively or negatively influence learning, as people are likely to limit cooperation and withhold information from each other, additionally competition can create pressure and encourage people to learn and adapt.

**Self-organisation:** Self organisation is the ability to respond to circumstances without centralised control or intent, allowing for systems, or part of, to adapt quickly (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a). ‘Effective use of ICT’ increases the potential for self-organisation as certain communication and information flow is easier and quicker. ‘Different levels of power’ negatively influences self-organisation as responsibility and decision making power is held by particular members of the system potentially limiting the rest of the system to organise.

## **3.2 Results phase 2 - Nonviolent Communication and communication dynamics in the sample organisations**

The intention of this phase was to understand our sample organisations in order to better inform our future discussion. SRQ C explored the context of NVC in the organisations. SRQ D explored whether the CDs found and defined in SRQ A were present, understandable and relevant to our sample organisations before distributing the survey widely to employees.

### **3.2.1 Results for SRQ C: How has Nonviolent Communication been introduced and how is it practiced in the sample organisations?**

Table 3.2 shows the results of the survey and interviews with organisation representatives.

*Table 3.2. Data on how NVC is implemented within the sample organisations*

Organisation	Country	Number of employees	Number of employees trained in NVC at the moment of survey	Percentage of trained staff
Health NGO	NL	140	60	43 %
School	NL	8	8	100%
Research institute	NL	Approx. 400	Approx. 35 employees; and entire management team of 8 people.	10 %

#### *History of NVC in sample organisations*

The following text further describes the context of NVC in each organisation, as derived from interviews and the survey amongst organisational representatives. For each organisation the reason for implementation, the start date of training, the type of training, and the formal opportunities for practice available are described.

**The School:** Parents were inspired to set up a school combining democratic school principles and NVC. The start date for NVC training of employees was diverse, with some trained before working at the school, and others when they enter the school as a staff member. Full time staff began training January 2016 and receives a full day of training every month, part time staff follow a 6 evenings basic course. Practice opportunities are encouraged and, a bi-weekly 3 hour ‘emotional hygiene session’ is facilitated by a certified NVC trainer.

**Health NGO:** NVC was introduced following an internal review which showed that there needed to be an internal culture change, as problems were not communicated to the right people and there was no ‘warm’ connection between colleagues. Training began in the beginning of 2016. Cohorts take part in a 3 day training. Formal practice opportunities occur at monthly lunch follow-up trainings held by an employee who is following a professional NVC training course.

**Research Institute:** The reason for implementation was unknown by our sources. Trainings have been held for groups of about 12 people in spring 2015, winter 2016 and autumn 2016. Each group received training for 6 mornings. Practice occurs in 2 hours non-compulsory practice sessions every 6 weeks for each trained cohort, attended by 4-8 people.

### **3.2.2 Results for SRQ D – Are the identified communication dynamics present in the sample organisations?**

Organisational representatives were surveyed and the answers to the question: “Please rate your perception of the level of challenge your organisation has with the following common organisational communication dynamics” are presented in Figure 3.1 (1 = not a challenge, 5 = a major challenge). The survey was filled in by two employees of the Research Institute. The numbers for this organisation are averages.

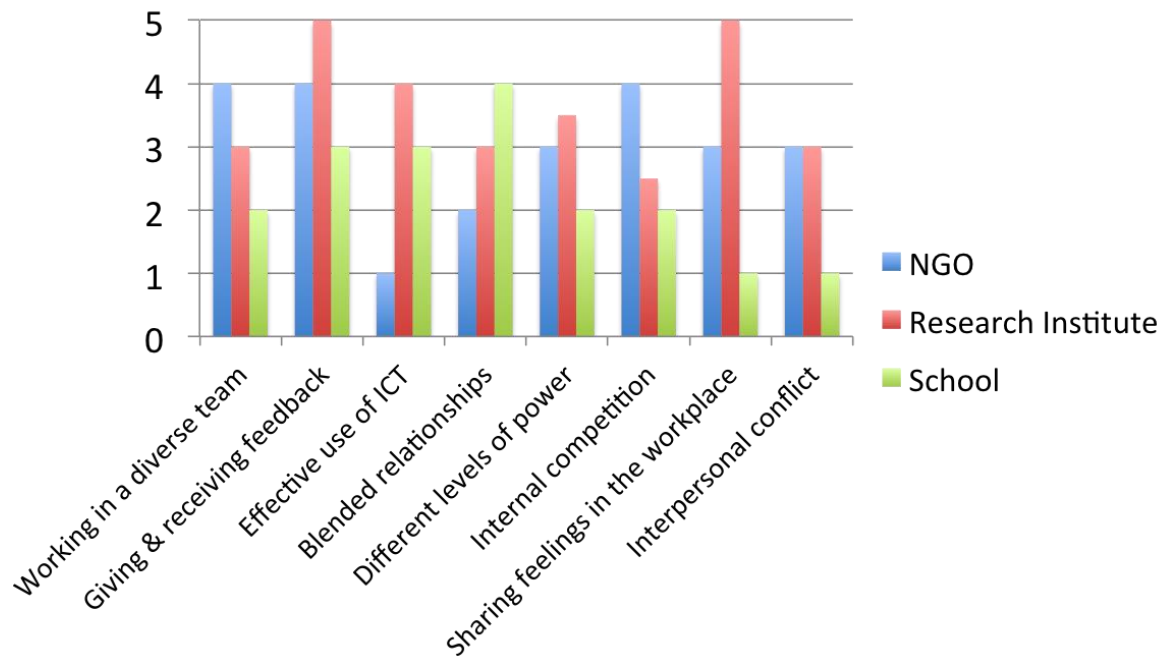


Figure 3.1. Perceived levels of communication dynamics being a challenge per organisation

### 3.3 Results phase 3 - The effects of Nonviolent Communication on communication dynamics in organisations

In this section the quantitative and qualitative data received from the employee survey, the semi- structured interviews with employees and with NVC trainers are presented in relation to SRQ E.

#### 3.3.1 Results for SRQ E: What are the effects of Nonviolent Communication on communication dynamics in organisations?

First an overview of quantitative data from the employee survey is presented. This is followed by a description of the qualitative data from the survey and semi-structured interviews per communication dynamic. Lastly, other main themes that emerged from the survey and interviews are presented.

##### *Quantitative Data – Survey*

The quantitative data from the employee survey are presented in figure 3.2 and can be found in a table in Appendix J.

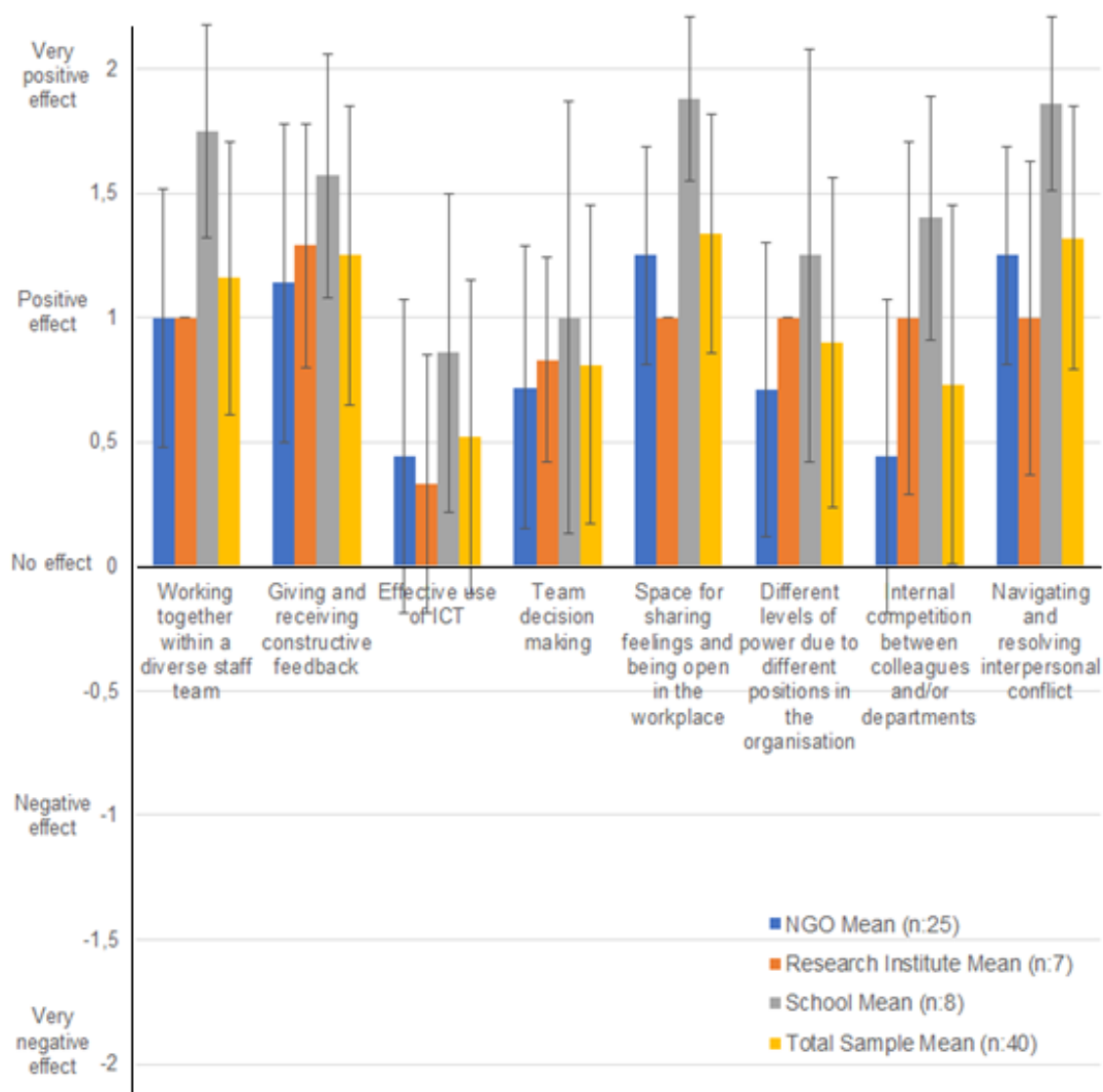


Figure 3.2. The effects of Nonviolent Communication on each communication dynamic per organisation

Looking at the averages of responses across all organisations, each communication dynamic was given a total average score between 0.52 and 1.34. The lowest score that was given for a CD in an organisation was for the ‘Effective use of ICT’ in Research Institute (0.33). This CD received the lowest score in all organisations. The highest score was for ‘Space for sharing feelings and openness’ in the School (1.88). In none of the organisations was NVC reported to have average negative effect on any of the CDs.

3 out of 40 total respondents reported NVC had a ‘negative impact’ rating (-1) on one of the CDs within an organisation. The three dynamics that were rated negatively by one person were ‘Team decision making’ (no explanation given); ‘Internal competition’ (no explanation given) and ‘Giving and receiving feedback’. For this negative rating, the following explanation was offered by the respondent:

*“I have the notion that feedback is being given in a way that is too careful or too positive, which is why perhaps too few critical comments are being shared.”* (Respondent NGO 5)

2017)

Four communication dynamics received an average score  $>1$ . The communication dynamics which were reported to be most positively affected by NVC were ‘Space for sharing feelings and being open at the workplace’ with an average score of 1.34 and ‘Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict’ with an average score of 1.32. These are closely followed by ‘Giving and receiving constructive feedback’ with 1.25, and ‘Working together within a diverse staff team’ with 1.16

Four challenges were rated with an average score  $0 < 1$ . These were ‘Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation’ with 0.90, ‘Team decision making’ with 0.81, ‘Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments’ with 0.73. The communication dynamic with the lowest score was ‘Effective use of ICT’ with 0.52.

For each question there were employees who responded that they had ‘no experience’ of NVC in relation to that particular dynamic. The total number of people expressing ‘no experience’ are presented in the table found in Appendix J, as a percentage of the total number of respondents. The CD with the fewest number of respondents claiming no experience was ‘Space for sharing feelings’ with 2 out of 40 (5%). The CDs, ‘Working with diverse teams’, ‘Internal competition’ and ‘Navigating conflict’ each had 3 out of 40 (7.5%) of respondents claiming to have no experience. ‘Giving and receiving feedback’ had 5 out of 40 (12.5%) claiming to have no experience. The highest levels of people reporting no experience were for the CDs ‘Team decision making’, 8 out of 40 (20%), ‘Different levels of power’, 10 out of 40 (25%), and ‘Effective use of ICT’, 10 out of 40 (25%).

### **3.3.2 Results per communication dynamic, effects and components - Qualitative data**

In this section the main findings per communication dynamic are described. For each CD the codes (code titles and explanation found in Appendix F) for the components of NVC and the effects of NVC that came out the most in the survey are named. Each response could be coded with multiple codes, and some responses did not yield any codes. A full list showing the frequency each code was referred to per CD is presented in Appendix K. This is followed by some illustrative quotes from the survey and interviews with employees. More quotes can be found in Appendix L. Lastly any relevant references to the CD that came up in the interviews with NVC trainers are quoted.

#### *Working in diverse staff teams*

Codes: In total 26 written replies were coded for the question linked to this CD. The effects of NVC that came up most in relation to this CD were: ‘Increased understanding’ (10), ‘Progress in work and/or relationship related issues’ (8) and ‘Higher ability to see/work with different perspectives and working styles’ (7). The components of NVC that were referred to most were: ‘Communication mode: listening’ (7), ‘Communication mode: expressing’ (7), ‘NVC step: needs’ (7) ‘NVC step: feelings’ (5).

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*“[NVC] Help[s] solve problems in some cases of miscommunication, because of better understanding of the underlying needs of the other person.” (Respondent NGO 18*

2017)

*“learnt that other people come from a different perspective and can’t force that [my] view onto another person” (Interviewee NGO 2017)*

#### *Giving and receiving constructive feedback*

Codes: In total 24 written replies were coded for this CD. The effects of NVC that came up most were: ‘Progress in work and/or relationship related issues’ (9), ‘Increased understanding’ (8), ‘Increased openness and sharing’ (6). The components of NVC that were referred to most were: ‘Communication mode: expressing’ (19), ‘NVC step: observation’ (4), ‘Recognizing judgements’ (4), ‘NVC step: feelings’ (3) and ‘Communication mode: listening’ (3).

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*“This way you keep observation and feelings separated - and you keep it close to yourself. As a result the "feedback" is not received negatively by the other.” (Respondent NGO 23 2017)*

*“When telling what a certain decision did with me, I recently used NVC. I notice that this decision makes me upset. This comes from the need for recognition for my role in this process.’ This has helped opening up the discussion.” (Respondent NGO 22 2017)*

#### Illustrative quotes from NVC trainers:

*“NVC is also honesty, it is getting feedback from your surroundings. Communicating how everyone affects each other. This could be gratitude, could be specific help. So people don’t feel so alone anymore because they see how they are affecting others.” (NVC trainer 1 Interview 2017)*

#### *Effective use of ICT*

Codes: In total 16 written replies were coded for this CD. The effect of NVC that came up most was: ‘Progress in work and/or relationship related issues’ (6). The component of NVC that was referred to most was: ‘Communication mode: expressing’ (6). There was no reference to ‘Communication mode: listening’. 5 reactions referred to why employees did ‘Not use NVC in ICT’.

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*“I am using NVC regularly in my mails, e.g. when trying to get something done from someone who I cannot speak to in person. I then try to connect my needs to the needs of the other person. It helps!” (Respondent NGO 22 2017)*

*“I only use email for formal communication, as soon as we seem to end up in a discussion I stop mailing and choose to have a personal conversation.” (Respondent NGO 21 2017)*

#### Illustrative quotes from NVC trainers:

*“Doing the observation, feelings, needs and request is actually the structure of the*

*well-crafted email anyway, I would agree with that a lot, in fact when people say NVC has no effect it just makes me wonder if they know how to contextualize those principles into an email” (Miyashiro Interview 2017)*

#### *Team decision making*

Codes: In total 18 written replies were coded for this CD. The effect of NVC that came up most was: ‘Progress in work and/or relationship related issues’ (8). The components of NVC that were referred to most were: ‘Communication mode: listening’ (5), ‘Communication mode expressing’ (5). 6 out of 7 responses from the school refer to the sociocratic structure that is used for decision making.

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*“less talking, more listening to one another” (Respondent NGO 15 2017),*

*“things are being mentioned, that earlier on would remain un-mentioned.” (Respondent NGO 01 2017),*

*“NVC challenges you to express yourself and creates a safe environment to do this.” (Respondent Research Institute 07 2017),*

*“We’re always paying attention to listening to everyone, but NVC style empathic listening tends to clear up what people really mean.” (Respondent Research Institute 01 2017),*

*“We already work with CONSENT, a sociocratic decision making model. NVC adds to this by giving space to pain, frustration, anger, etc. (Respondent School 04 2017)*

#### *Sharing feelings and openness in the workplace*

Codes: In total 22 written replies were coded for this CD. The effects of NVC that came up most were: ‘Increased openness and sharing’ (13) ‘Progress in work and/or relationship related issues’ (9), ‘Sense of safety’ (6). The components of NVC that were referred to most were: ‘Communication mode: Expressing’ (11), ‘NVC step: feelings’ (9), ‘Communication mode: listening’ (3), ‘Communication mode: self-connection’ (3). There were 4 responses referring to ‘Shared NVC language’, or the absence of this. Responses from the school referred to ‘Organisational structure’ (5).

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*“[NVC] gives me the courage to do so and knowing others have done the training, where it is coming from” (Respondent NGO 13 2017)*

*“I’ve become more alert about empathically listening to people, but it doesn’t really work the other way around when talking to untrained people. People tend to offer sympathy and other ineffective strategies.” (Respondent Research Institute 01 2017)*

*“There is the focus of starting the day together, sharing, giving each other empathy and having the by-weekly team-emotional-hygiene.” (Respondent School 06 2017)*

### *Different levels of power*

Codes: In total 17 written replies were coded for this CD. The effects of NVC that came up most were: 'Progress in work and/or relationship related issues' (5) and 'Space for conversations that were not held before' (3). The components of NVC that were referred to most were: 'Communication mode: expressing' (7) and 'Communication mode: listening' (3). 2 people referred to 'Challenge to apply NVC' in this situation. 4 people from the school referred to their sociocratic structure.

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*"I was able to express myself to my manager regarding unease without him/her feeling affected/threatened in his/her power position. On the contrary, when I called for help/support I got what I needed."* (Respondent Research Institute 02 2017)

*"Unfortunately, the managers who need it, aren't doing the NVC training. On your own you can make things move, but the effect would be tripled if both managers and employees would apply NVC."* (Respondent Research Institute 03 2017)

### *Internal competition*

Codes: In total 12 written replies were coded for this CD. The effect of NVC that came up most was: 'Progress in work and/or relationship related issues' (2). The component of NVC that was referred to most was: 'Communication mode: expressing' (2). 3 people refer to competition not being an issue in their work environment.

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*"Luckily, I find myself in the circumstance that the department in which I work is not competitive, rather it is cooperative."* (Respondent Research Institute 07 2017)

*"You notice that in conflicts, everybody is more aware about their own part/contribution and can feel where it comes from. As a result, many conversations start with a reflection on their own part, rather than the part of the other (reproof)"* (Respondent School 07 2017)

### *Navigating Interpersonal conflict*

Codes: In total 21 written replies were coded for this CD. The effects of NVC that came up most were: 'Progress in work and/or relationship related issues' (10), 'Increased understanding' (9), and 'Space for conversations that were not held before' (5). The components of NVC that were referred to most were: 'Communication mode: expressing' (9), 'Communication mode: listening' (4). 3 people describe 'Challenges to apply NVC' with regards to this CD.

#### Illustrative quotes from employees:

*"Because of better understanding of underlying needs we can resolve easier any type of interpersonal conflict."* (Respondent NGO 18 2017)

*"We now have a tool that we can use when there are conflicts or 'conflicts-to-be'. E.g. the other day I had to ask someone to shorten a piece for the annual report, which he had already shortened twice. I knew he wouldn't be happy about this, so I used NVC*



*in my request. It worked!”* (Respondent NGO 22 2017)

*“This only works partially. Expressing in a connecting way is one thing, but what is also needed is the willingness to hear and really having a good intention towards another person.”* (Respondent Research Institute 03 2017)

### 3.3.3 Total numbers of codes for effects

In total, the effects that were described in the survey that NVC has on CDs are (in brackets is the frequency that each effect was coded for): ‘Progress in work and/or relationship related issues’ (59), ‘Increased understanding’ (37), ‘Increased openness and sharing’ (28), ‘Higher ability to see/work with different perspectives and working styles’ (18), ‘Space for conversations that were not held before’ (17), ‘More awareness’ (15), ‘Sense of connection’ (13), ‘Sense of safety’ (12), and ‘Space for honesty’ (8).

### 3.3.4 Context: differences between organisations

In the survey, employee interviews and trainer interviews there were several references to the contexts in which people used NVC, and how these contexts might influence the use of NVC. Table 3.3 shows how many times each of the context codes was referred to for each organisation, in the survey.

*Table 3.3. Numbers for codes about the context in which NVC is used*

	NGO	Research institute	School	Total
Organisational structure	2	2	27	31
Secure environment needed	2	5	13	20
NVC requires practice	3	2	9	14
Facilitator present	0	1	10	11
Shared NVC Language	5	3	1	9
Context: Time needed for NVC conversation	0	2	1	3

#### *Organisational structure*

Respondents from the school referred to the sociocratic structure that is used for decision making and for starting and ending the day 27 times. Quotes imply that this structure has an influence on how NVC affects the communication dynamics:

*“Besides using NVC, we work in this organisation in a sociocratic way, which enables that the different voices in the school are being heard much more. NVC helps this.”*

(Respondent School 03 2017).

Each of the trainers also had their opinions about how NVC can/should be implemented in organisations:

*“I think it’s very powerful, but I don’t think it’s the solution to everything, I think there’s more things that need to be in an organisation, in a group, and so on for it to work. But it certainly has a huge impact on all the relationships.”*(Interview NVC trainer 1 2017)

*“When it is not embedded in their organisational level, it usually goes away. It doesn’t become a culture change, empathy does not become a cultural norm. The way I believe is to not make NVC a goal but a tool that is embedded in the goal they want to achieve.”* (Interview Marie Miyashiro 2017)

*“It is the leadership people who need it, I will not take the job unless the leaders are also willing to engage. Because otherwise those with less structural power empower themselves with NVC and try to take it to people with structural power in terms of request and get batted away.”* (Interview NVC trainer 3 2017)

*“Every system is built of individual human beings, I believe it is useful to start at individual level . . . however, I also think that we need to meet people’s needs in a way that allows people to take NVC on. For example, in a workplace people say they have a lot to do and then they get more tasks and more responsibilities and they have to take on another course [in NVC], another training in addition to everything else”.* (Interview NVC trainer 2 2017)

*Secure environment needed; and Facilitator present*

Respondents from the survey and interviews referred to having the value of a secure environment, and this potentially aided by the presence of a facilitator:

*“Unfortunately, one doesn’t dare to really apply this in the team yet.”* (Respondent Research Institute 02 2017).

*“If I do not feel safe in the environment then it’s hard for me to relax enough to function. Safety supports learning, NVC supports safety. . . . another thing, NVC is connecting to choice, connecting to choice you have motivation, if you have motivation then learning flows.”* (Interview School 1 2017)

*“During the emotional hygiene meetings of the team, we put what we have learned into practice, under the loving guidance of our NVC trainer.”* (Respondent School 04 2017).

*“Yes its possible without facilitator, but having somebody experienced in NVC is something I wouldn’t want missing, because of his skills and experience, he is able to find the treasure maybe sometimes quicker or more easily”* (Interview School 1 2017)

*NVC requires practice*

Respondents from the school refer to their regular practice sessions

*“During the year course that we as staff of the school are following, we practice*

*boundlessly with this.*” (Respondent School 04 2017).

Also respondents from the NGO talk about the practice group they have formed:

*“we have formed an ‘intervisie’ [translation: ‘practice’] group to help each other understand and formulate feelings and needs to effectively communicate with others”* (Respondent NGO 11 2017)

The need for practice and support is echoed by trainers:

*“Without support, e.g. family, workplace, it is very hard to make that shift to the new way of thinking. That’s why organisations can be good as they offer a place for support.”* (NVC Trainer 1 interview)

#### *Shared NVC language*

Some respondents refer to how it is helpful that people throughout the organisation know NVC:

*“[NVC] gives me the courage to do so and knowing others have done the training, where it is coming from”* (Respondent NGO 13 2017)

*“Because we (try to) use NVC in our organisation we do not talk judgmentally about each other so much and it feels very safe to address someone when something is not going so well.”* (Respondent School 03 2017)

Others talk about how it is a challenge to use NVC when not everybody knows it:

*“It is not part of the policy to communicate in NVC way, not everyone is trained. This is difficult . . . with people who don’t know the NVC method, then the results will not be similar as with someone who knows about it. The persons who do not know about it will mainly see you as someone who is being ‘woolly’ instead of really listening to what you are saying.”* (Interviewee Research Institute 2017)

*“If not everyone practices NVC your efforts will not pay off.”* (Respondent NGO 12 2017)

### **3.3.5 About Nonviolent Communication in general**

All trainers agreed that the key of NVC is to focus on needs. For example NVC trainer 1 says:

*“be wise about it [practically applying NVC], actually meet needs more than anything, which is also the core of NVC. And sometimes those needs are met by talking and sometimes by something else”* (Interview NVC trainer 1 2017)

*“The beautiful thing about NVC is that it shows you how to get to needs and not wants, and the big difference between the two. A lot of people have been confusing needs and wants for a long time, wants are strategies and needs are needs”* (Interview NVC trainer 2 2017).

*“It’s not really about feelings, this is just the stepping stone to the needs”* (Interview NVC trainer 3 2017)

Furthermore, NVC trainer 3 describes that the step that makes NVC really powerful is the request step:

*“The request cannot be forgotten, it is the muscle”* (Interview NVC trainer 3 2017).

## 4. Discussion

Given the many dimensions of organisational communication (Conrad and Poole 2002) and the many levels within an organisation on which communication takes place (Figure 1.1), it is no surprise that research on organisational communication is complex. For the aim of this thesis, the authors have tried to make their research on NVC achievable and valid by identifying common communication dynamics in organisations (SRQ A). It must be said that the resulting list of CDs (see Appendix H) is far from complete and that the CDs identified overlap each other in many ways. The need for navigating interpersonal conflict for example, can arise in diverse teams, during the process of team decision making or in the form of internal competition in an organisation. That said, the responses to SRQ D imply that all communication dynamics that were identified are present to a certain extent in all of the sample organisations. It can be expected that they are present throughout different organisations at different moments in time. Hence they seem to be a good enough lens to research the effects of NVC on communication in organisations, and thereby on the adaptive capacity of an organisation.

In order to find an answer to the main research question: *“How does Nonviolent Communication support the adaptive capacity of organisations?”*, the first section of this chapter will discuss the findings on the effects that NVC has on each of the communication dynamics, as well as some discussion of the surrounding organisational context. This is followed in the second section of the chapter by a discussion on how NVC supports each of the elements of AC, and how NVC can support the AC of organisations in general.

### 4.1 The effects of Nonviolent Communication on communication dynamics in organisations

The first result to highlight is that across all eight of the identified communication dynamics, which fit different levels of the organisational system, the average perceived contribution of NVC practice towards navigating each dynamic was rated with a positive score in the employee survey across all sample organisations. Based on this data, NVC appears to have the potential for having a beneficial effect on each of the communication dynamics. If this finding is representative of communication practice in organisations, it suggests that NVC as an impact across communication dynamics, which makes it effective to improve organisational communication. Results suggest that NVC’s focus on needs can be of help in many communication dynamics.

Having reflected of the holistic aspect of NVC’s contribution across the communication dynamics, in this section each dynamic will be reviewed individually by looking at the communication literature from where the CDs emerged, before a review of the key results related to this dynamic. There will then be a discussion of the implications these results may have for organisations looking to implement NVC. Any surprising results or areas for further research are also mentioned. After a discussion of each dynamic a section will examine the codes which emerged from the results in relation to the context of NVC use.

#### *Working in diverse staff teams*

Diversity is a source of many communication dynamics such as language barriers, cultural subtleties and other reasons for intentional and unintentional meaning-making (Brett, Behfar and Kern 2006; Eisenberg et al. 2016).

NVC's effect on working in diverse teams received a high score of +1.16 with a particularly high score of +1.75 at the school. The data from employees emphasised NVC's ability to create 'Increased understanding' of other people and their motivations. This survey code arose 10 times. Quotes from the survey and employee interviews support that this understanding arose from a desire to look for/listen to other people's feelings or needs. This is not a surprising result as NVC emphasises the focus on universal needs as a way to understand and connect with others and the NVC trainers who were interviewed also referred to this.

In the changing social context caused by the sustainability challenge migration is a major issue and likely to increase (Linnenluecke and Griffiths 2010), therefore diversity within many organisations is also likely to increase. NVC's emphasis on listening and its ability to build understanding between colleagues can help diverse teams to hold shared interpretations, or discuss misunderstandings, and so work effectively together.

#### *Giving and receiving constructive feedback*

Giving and receiving constructive feedback is essential in communications, it is necessary for 'decoding' verbal and non-verbal communication to ensure that the receiver is constructing the same meaning intended by the sender (Eisenberg et al. 2016). Additionally feedback serves to encourage, individuals, teams or organisations to pursue an established strategy or consider alternative strategies (Eisenberg et al. 2016).

NVC appears to have a very positive effect on feedback and received a high score of +1.25. Quotes emphasise that clearly separating observation and feelings makes feedback more concrete and that by keeping the feedback close to oneself, instead of expressing judgements of the other, feedback became easier to receive by colleagues without feelings of negativity or accusation. This finding appears to confirm the NVC literatures claims that the NVC method is designed to help practitioners to go beyond judgements of the other party based on a sense of 'right or 'wrong' and to create a communication structure where constructive feedback can be given in a neutral, non-accusatory way.

A surprising finding was that the code "Communication mode: Expressing" (19 times) heavily outweighed the code "Communication mode: Listening" (3 times). It was expected that these two codes would be more in balance, as NVC can also be used to listen to the needs behind what someone expresses. For example, if feedback is expressed in a judgmental way, the listener can help translate it to feelings and needs language with the help of NVC (Rosenberg 2003). This finding implies that our respondents found NVC to help more with giving feedback than receiving it. Potentially it can also mean that people find it easier to remember the times that they actively applied NVC over the times that they passively received it.

Feedback, given in formal appraisal meetings and in daily interactions, is essential in organisations, especially when work needs to respond to changing environments. It allows for work tasks and behaviour to be addressed and assessed. Giving and receiving feedback can be difficult for all parties involved as it touches upon personal actions, where people may feel vulnerable. By offering an effective structure for giving feedback, NVC appears to have the potential to make feedback both more precise and avoid negative consequences of people feeling accused.

### *Effective use of ICT*

ICT has changed the way organisations and individuals communicate. As well as advantages it has caused additional communication dynamics to navigate, such as the blurring of lines between formal and informal communication (Hedman and Valo 2015). Also it removes nonverbal cues which are essential for making meaning from communications (Cox and Dannany 2005).

Although still rated as positive, NVC's effect on ICT received the lowest score of any dynamic in each of the sample organisations with an average score of +0.52. Although some employees stated that they do use NVC to structure their emails, responses seem to support Hedman and Valo's assertion that ICT impacts the formal/informal line. This may be related to email being perceived as 'unnuanced' compared to face-to-face communication's added spheres of interpretation such as from nonverbal cues. Most people see NVC primarily for relational aspects of communication and seem to associate the use of ICT more with the transactional side of communication.

This result, although understandable due to NVC's emphasis on interpersonal connection, is of interest as literature, NVC trainers and some employees describe ICT's potential for strong relational communication through e-mail. Miyashiro describes how the 4 steps of NVC are the structure for any well-written e-mail (Interview 2017) and Cox and Dannahy (2005) show how effective NVC can be in building meaningful relationships through e-mail. This raises the question of why such a gap between potential use and the reported usage exists? Further research could explore if NVC training and/or practice sessions explicitly reference e-mail and how NVC can support writing effective e-mails.

ICT has become an essential part of communication in most organisations and will continue to affect the way we work and communicate, including increased work from home and communication across multi-nationals. Although further research is needed, due to its clear guidelines for structuring communication, NVC is a form of training which may be of great value in building relationships through ICT and navigating other communication dynamics arising from ICT.

### *Team decision making*

Dynamics relating to team decision making are heavily represented in the literature. Jones and Roelofsma (2000) show how teams must navigate dynamics including 'groupthink', 'group polarization', and 'lack of shared clarity on decisions'. Hedman and Valo (2015) show that the team decision making process is not always possible effective or open for participation of all parties involved.

According to our data NVC appears to have a positive impact on team decision making receiving an average score of +0.81. However, the code 'Organisational structure' is coded 7 times (including 6 times for the school) and organisational structure was also referred to in interviews. It seems that for this dynamic the context in which NVC is practiced is especially important and this will be discussed further below.

NVC does seem to support team decision making with people feeling the space to mention topics which may previously have been difficult to raise and an increased emphasis on listening to get to know another person's arguments.

A finding of interest for further research is that the codes ‘NVC step: feelings’ (2 times) and ‘NVC step: needs’ (1 time) are hardly mentioned. This is interesting, as it can be expected that talking about needs might influence motivations and/or the decision made.

Organisations ability to work in/with change requires coordinated action. NVC’s ability to help conversations happen in a different way, with all team members and their motivations being heard, is likely of value. However, it must not be considered in isolation and is dependent on the organisational context and the surrounding structures in place.

#### *Space for sharing feelings and openness in the workplace*

Humans are emotional beings, affected by circumstances inside and outside of work. This side of people’s behaviour is not always considered or communicated in work environments with barriers to the sharing of feelings coming in many forms. From a personal and interpersonal level these barriers include learned behaviours guarding against intimate disclosure (Eisenberg et al. 2016) or negative humor and sarcasm (Thompson 2009). From an organisational level there is a belief that talking and sharing can be seen as “interfering with productivity” (Eisenberg et al. 2016) or that embracing individuality can lead to chaos (Laloux 2014). As with other dynamics the ability to share feelings and be open in the workplace relies on the balance between formal and informal communication (Hedman and Valo 2015)

According to the data, NVC appears to have a very positive effect on space for sharing feelings and openness in the workplace. It received a high average score of + 1.34, and the School scored +1.88. ‘Increased openness and sharing’ was coded 13 times in the employee survey for this dynamic (and 28 times overall), and ‘Communication mode: Expressing’ was coded 11 times. These codes are supported by employee quotes which state that knowing there is an understanding of NVC in the workplace gives them the courage to share their feelings and that sharing of feelings enable a better understanding of colleagues.

It is important to emphasise this dynamic in relation to the wider NVC model - specifically feelings’ connection to ‘needs’. NVC holds feelings as a central element and allows for: a structured way to express them, by referring closely to observation of environments and judgments, and (by using a vocabulary sheet) exploration of their causes and implications. Feelings should not be seen in isolation, but feelings should be seen mainly as a stepping stone to identifying an individual’s needs (interview NVC trainer 3 2017). Positive or negative feelings arise, respectively, out of met or unmet needs.

Additionally, NVC’s approach emphasises personal responsibility for feelings and people are encouraged to express from their own experience instead of blaming or judging others (Rosenberg 2003). As shown in other communication dynamics, such as ‘giving and receiving feedback’ this makes it easier to express without feeling like you are attacking another person.

Change in organisations can be a particular spur for feelings to arise in staff. Organisations which create spaces and opportunities for the feelings of staff to be considered are likely to be able to account for staff’s feelings and their causes when making decisions. Increased sharing of feelings is also likely to help people feel significant and build better connections between employees which in turn leads to increased trust. However, it is important that the contextual setting for sharing feelings and openness is suitable, and this will be discussed further below.

#### *Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation*

Power can manifest in many ways, such as power-over or power-with others. This dynamic specifically referred to structural power due to different positions. Different levels of power



(and responsibility) are arguably necessary for the functioning of an organisation. However, this CD also brings challenges, such as people jockeying for power (Thompson 2009). Hierarchical structure can cause resentment and lack of motivation at less powerful levels (Laloux 2014). Power dynamics and the challenges they bring inevitably impact communication, for example through people being strategically ambiguous in their language or through the suppression of certain voices (Eisenberg et al. 2016).

NVC appears to have a positive effect on navigating different levels of power in organisations having received a score of +0.9. However, similarly to team decision making, responses imply that NVC's impact seems to depend on organisational structure and other contextual factors, such as managers also being trained to enable a shared language. NVC Trainer 3 believes that it is essential for management to be trained in NVC, along with employees. If not, the empowerment that NVC can bring employees may backfire, as they might not get the space to act upon this empowerment which can be very demotivating (Interview NVC trainer 3, 2017). The NGO first initiated NVC partly due to seeking a change in leadership style to be more listening based, and for empowerment of staff.

Responses show that despite certain challenges people use NVC in communication with their managers, even if their managers are not trained, and refer to a similar relationship as found in giving and receiving feedback. They find that they have the ability to express themselves without threatening their managers position and that NVC can lead to a better understanding and sense of mutual respect.

By creating mutual respect and allowing people to see each other for their humanity rather than their position, NVC can be of value. However, power and the intention with which it is used is an issue and so NVC must not be considered in isolation of the organisational context.

#### *Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments*

According to the literature, internal competition holds a similar position/relationship in organisational communication to levels of power, with the battle for scarce organisational resources leading to jockeying for these resources. Competition can also cause pressure (Eisenberg et al. 2016) and the debating of the expertise and relevance of others (Thompson 2009).

NVC's apparent effect, although still positive at +0.73, was the second lowest score and the results across the sample organisations varied widely (NGO +0.44; Research Institute +1.00; the School +1.40). Additionally, there were very few written responses to help the authors' understanding, with only 12 written responses coded. With these results the authors feel that any significant conclusions cannot be drawn with certainty about the value of NVC for organisations dealing with this dynamic.

However, the result is a slight surprise as NVC's focus on needs aims to create win-win scenarios, by meeting the needs of both parties. That is to say it attempts to remove a driver of competition. The result is likely influenced because of the type of organisations in our sample, which are not business oriented. Organisations with a higher pressure on, for example, sales targets may respond differently. Further research on this lack of data could explore how competition is lived in these organisations. Potential questions are: does competition only arise at certain key points such as promotion? Is competition present in the consciousness of staff in a way that informs day-to-day behaviour?

### *Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict*

Interpersonal conflict can occur in organisations for many reasons, including other dynamics listed in this study such as power and competition. Some would argue that conflict is even inevitable (Tuckman 1965). Conflict can create tensions and other negative feelings but it is not necessarily negative (Tuckman 1965), and the impact depends upon the manner in which conflict is addressed.

NVC appears to have a very positive effect on this dynamic receiving an average score of +1.32. Codes for 'Progress in work and/or relationship related issues' (10 times), 'Space for conversations that were not held before' (5 times), 'Communication mode: Expressing' (9 times) and 'Increased understanding' (9 times) were common. Quotes showed that NVC helped resolve conflict by clarifying misunderstandings and making the 'unspoken be spoken' and by exploring underlying needs.

This result is not a surprise as NVC is widely used in mediation scenarios (Rosenberg 2003). Trainers emphasise that by allowing for people and their needs, to be heard, understanding is created which aids in resolving conflicts. The ability for creating new conversations also suggests that implicit conflict and tensions can be made explicit, potentially allowing for the navigation/neutral exploration of conflict before conflict escalates.

One surprise worthy for further research is the 'NVC Step: Request'. It is not greatly present in the results (coded once for this conflict dynamic and 3 times in total) but likely has an important role to play to move beyond understanding. NVC trainer 3 said that the request is the muscle of NVC and it allows people to go beyond expression of needs by asking for a change in behaviour. This change in behaviour is often necessary for preventing a conflict from recurring.

Interestingly, the school, which interviews and surveys suggest has a close team and regular practices of NVC, gave NVC's effect on this dynamic a very high score (+1.86). This supports the suggestion that conflict is present in the team and likely inevitable but the manner in which it is resolved is of relevance. Most organisations will face conflict, big or small, between individuals at some point. NVC, with suitable practice and training, can be of great value in working with this conflict to move forward.

### *Context of practicing NVC – Organisational Structure*

As indicated by some of the above discussed results the surrounding organisational environment, or context, in which NVC is used appears to have large potential for influencing its effectiveness. For example, the School's average scores were higher for each communication dynamic than in either of the other organisations. The context related codes that came out of the survey were: 'Organisational Structure' (31 times); 'Secure Environment Needed' (20 times); 'NVC requires practice' (14 times); 'Facilitator Present' (11 times); and 'Shared NVC Language' (9 times). These contexts will be discussed here with their relevance as a whole and especial relevance to specific dynamics.

The code 'organisational structure' had 27 out of its 31 codes applied to answers from the school. The school uses a sociocratic structure, but exploring the exact structures which are best supported by, and which support NVC, is beyond the scope of this research. However, it is clear that 'organisational structure' is significant for NVC's impact on communications. This is supported by all 4 trainers interviewed with NVC trainer 1 referring to NVC being useful but not a 'solution to everything', more "things" are needed in an organisation. Miyashiro insists

that to be of true value, and form a culture change, NVC must be embedded throughout the whole organisational as an integral part of its operations. NVC trainer 3 refuses to bring NVC in to organisations unless leadership are also trained. NVC trainer 2 recognizes that the workplace has many competing tasks and responsibilities and these can out-prioritize NVC's adoption unless people's needs are met in the right way.

Organisational structure as a formal framework/system can take many shapes and influence the other context codes that were derived from the survey. The other context codes can be seen more as referring to the environment or culture of an organisation.

#### *Context of practicing NVC – Practice environment*

'Secure environment needed' (20 times) was a common code with 4 codes each in the dynamics 'Working in a diverse team'; 'Giving and receiving feedback'; 'Team decision making'; 'Sharing feelings in the workplace'; and 'Navigating interpersonal conflict'. This need for a secure environment is supported by trainers Miyashiro, trainer 1 and trainer 3 all say that taking responsibility for one's own feelings and connecting from empathy require courage. Quotes from employees imply that using NVC can lead to feelings of vulnerability and require courage.

The need for individual courage may be increased when considering that common learned behaviours in organisations restrict the expression of feelings and organisational cultures require the wearing of a 'professional mask' by employees (Eisenberg et al. 2016; Laloux 2014). To remove this mask and express personal vulnerabilities where it is not expected requires courage and safety. More discussion on this topic follows under the heading trust in section 4.2.

Two factors which may help contribute to this secure environment, and therefore NVCs effectiveness, are 'Shared NVC language' (9 times) and 'Facilitator Present' (11 times). A facilitator trained in NVC can create a secure environment and, as mentioned in the School interview (2017), can use their experience to focus on needs with skill and precision at weekly meetings.

The need for a shared language, or shared understanding of NVC, was referred to many times by employees as a challenge. They say that trying to use NVC with untrained people will not have the same effects. Additionally, the trained user and/or the non-trained colleague can require courage to overcome feelings of awkwardness or uncertainty. As alluded to above, the challenge of shared language is especially the case for the 'Different levels of power' dynamic when managers are not trained.

The positive results of the research institute, where only 1-in-10 employees are trained, shows that NVC seems to still have the potential to be effective without shared understanding. This may, in part, relate to NVC components being adapted in their usage by different people. All employees interviewed were asked which components or steps they most used and all differed in their responses, for example steps which they were not comfortable with were adapted or ignored (Research Institute interview) but NVC was still found to be of value.

Although NVC is used and has effects in diverse ways, it requires many years to really learn and integrate into a person's communication habits and reach its full potential (Beck 2005; NVC trainer 1 interview 2017; NVC trainer 3 interview 2017; NGO employee interview 2017). NVC trainer 1 when interviewed (2017) shared with us her belief that organisations, due to their

potential for regular practice and communication with others who understand the model, can be valuable in offering the support needed to integrate NVC.

NVC, although valuable for individuals to use independently, its potential to contribute positively to communication dynamics in an organisation is greatly increased by the way in which an organisation implements it as an intentional organisational language. The above discussion demonstrates some of the factors to consider.

## 4. 2 The effects of Nonviolent Communication on the adaptive capacity of organisations

As the NVC/CD relationship for all dynamics received a positive score, one might expect that any positive correlation assessed in the CD/AC relationship (explored via SRQ B, with detailed results in Appendix I) suggests NVC also has a potentially positive contribution to this element of AC. However, the way in which NVC impacts a CD does not necessarily influence this CD/AC relationship at all. For example ICT may increase the capacity for self-organisation within an organisation, via the increased availability of data, but this increase in data is not due to the use of NVC, and hence self-organisation is not supported by NVC via ICT. NVC might even have an impact that negatively influences this element of AC.

Therefore, to be able to look at how NVC does support the elements of AC, the effect of NVC on CDs was compared to the how's of the CD/AC relationship (see figure 4.1). This section explores the relationship of NVC to each element of AC. For each element results for multiple communication dynamics will be used to support the discussion.

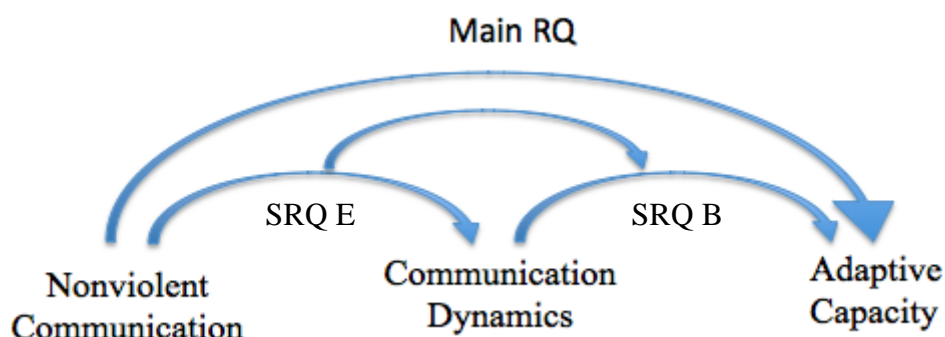


Figure 4.1. The first step of relating NVC to AC; connecting SRQ E with SRQ B

### *Diversity*

Diversity increases possibilities, which is necessary when one does not know what might happen in the future. Having many options increases the opportunity that one of those strategies helps to be resilient in case of change or shock. Diversity also adds different perspectives, which contributes to the knowledge and understanding of a system (Missimer et al. 2017a). To be able to have as many different ideas, strategies, perspectives etc. as possible, and make use of the opportunities this brings, the people in a system need to be diverse and able to express their diverse perspectives.

The results for the communication dynamic “Working in a diverse team” show that NVC has a positive effect on the ability of people to navigate this CD. It does so by enabling people to

resolve miscommunications and to understand the different perspectives and motivations of their colleagues. This understanding is mainly enhanced by the ability of people to communicate their needs clearly, which is stressed as a main contribution of NVC by survey respondents and NVC trainers who were interviewed. Furthermore, the results in general suggest that employees are more likely to express their opinions or needs when they are trained in NVC, even opinions that would not have been expressed before. This enlarged likelihood of opinions being expressed, increases the diversity of perspectives that can be used to react to changes in the environment.

Diversity in a social system also brings challenges (Vangen 2017), such as misunderstanding, confusion and conflict. The results show that NVC is an effective tool to help resolve conflict by listening, empathising with one another and focusing on the underlying motivations of individuals (i.e. needs). NVC can enable an organisation to navigate the challenges of diverging opinions by making it less likely that these challenges are insurmountable. NVC seems to be a fit communication tool for enabling organisations to work with diversity, especially when most employees are trained and it creates a shared language amongst employees with different backgrounds.

### *Trust*

Trust is one of the main variables that creates value in social systems. “Trust is a key element of social life, in other social sciences - it is often termed the fabric, which binds society together” (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a, 37). Without trust between various individuals, it is difficult or impossible to achieve collective learning, diversity and self-organisation in a system (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a)

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) describe that trustworthiness is made up of three elements: ability/competence, motivation of benevolence and integrity. A well-known theory of interpersonal trust, Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientations (FIRO), describes how people feel trust and trusted in a team when each group member senses that they are being significant, being competent and being liked (Schultz 1958 in Robèrt et al 2015). NVC is likely to support these aspects in the following ways:

The results show that NVC enhances listening in organisations as seen in the results for the communication dynamic of, for example, ‘team decision making’. Being heard can give people a feeling of being significant, especially if followed by action. NVC helps with communicating tasks or actions (i.e. the ‘NVC step: request’) in a clear and precise manner. Being able to take the wanted action after a clear request makes one look competent in the eyes of others, and can also enhance their integrity in the other’s eyes. Completing tasks also makes oneself feel competent.

The communication dynamic ‘giving and receiving feedback’, which received very positive results, nicely illustrates the above discussion on how NVC supports trust on an interpersonal level. If you are given feedback and encouraged to change your actions but do not do so, this influences the view of your integrity and/or competence negatively. Likewise, if you do change your actions, this can enhance your integrity and level of competence. Giving and receiving feedback can also be a particularly vulnerable space and process where support and safety is needed.

Another factor of trust is vulnerability. Using NVC requires the courage to be vulnerable and open. Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis (2007) define trust as “a willingness to be vulnerable to

another party”. This raises the question of whether vulnerability not only emerges from trust, but whether being vulnerable leads to more trust. Research by Meyer, Le Fevre, and Robinson (2017) shows that it does. They describe how leaders, when admitting their mistakes and being open and vulnerable about this, can help build trust by increasing trust propensity (trust propensity is “the dispositional willingness to rely on and ultimately trust others” (Meyer, Le Fevre, and Robinson 2017, 221). By admitting their mistakes, leaders signal their “truthfulness, benevolence and integrity” (230). When leaders do this it builds an atmosphere of trust, and it is fair to expect that this is also the case for employees. Furthermore, it was found that a reason for people to not disclose their contributions to problems is their judgements about others (Meyer, Le Fevre, and Robinson 2017). NVC specifically helps practitioners to look beyond judgements that one has about other people and the results of this study show that NVC can support this in an organisational setting. It does so by enabling one to distinguish between judgements and observations. The space for sharing and openness that results suggest is created by NVC can further encourage employees to be vulnerable and share their mistakes.

Through these mechanisms, the practice of NVC across an organisation may hold a great potential to enhance honest communication about performance between different levels of organisational hierarchy and thereby increase trust within the organisation.

### *Learning*

Learning refers to the ability of the individual to learn by him or herself and the ability of the system to learn as a whole. It enables a system to sense change and adapt to it effectively. (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017b, 48). To create an environment for learning in an organisation, Englehardt and Simmons (2002) suggest there needs to be, amongst other aspects, “an emphasis on broad and diverse participation and interaction, as well as constant interactive communication throughout the entire organisation” (43) and prevention of fear of failure.

The extent of active participation in decision making in an organisation is influenced by surrounding organisational structures and can be limited or spread through the entire organisation. Employee survey results implied that staff using NVC are more able to hold meaningful conversations with those in organisational positions of power, for example their managers. NVC also encourages potentially meaningful participation and interaction between all positions of an organisation, for example through the CDs of ‘working in a diverse team’ and ‘team decision making’. In this way learning can pass through from one area of an organisation to another.

Prevention of fear of failure could be interpreted as allowing people to be vulnerable and admit mistakes. To encourage this, it is necessary to create an environment in which openly talking about mistakes is accepted and supported, and seen as an opportunity for learning, instead of prompting punitive actions (Meyer, Le Fevre, and Robinson 2017). The results support the notion that NVC encourages vulnerability, and creates safety for expressing one’s mistakes. By knowing that the other has the intention/ability to hear without judgement, mistakes are more likely to be accepted rather than prompting punitive action.

Another factor essential for learning is the giving and receiving of constructive feedback, as it enables one to see whether taken actions were suitable for a certain situation or need to be adjusted in the future (Jones, Woods, and Guillaume 2016). Many respondents shared an example in which they expressed constructive feedback successfully using NVC. Jones, Woods, and Guillaume (2016) describe how one can more effectively incorporate feedback if there is a safe space for reflection on the feedback. Results suggest that when using NVC, the

giver of feedback already reflects more on how to formulate feedback and is able to share it in such a way that it feels safe and constructive for the receiver to hear. It potentially does so by offering a clear model on how to keep feedback specific and objective and make clear suggestions for improvement (through the steps of observation, feelings, needs and request). Hence NVC can support learning through feedback.

### *Self-Organisation*

Self-organisation is the ability of a system to organise itself without “system level intent or centralized control” (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a). Self-organisation is essential for individuals and systems to adapt quickly; with self-organisation decisions can be made without always needing to be approved by a top-down power structure.

To self-organise members, a system needs two key things: input upon which to base their decisions and the power to act upon those decisions. NVC can add space for feelings and needs as inputs to the decision making process. Also, NVC can make communication effective by being very precise and clarifying what people really mean (Respondent 1 Research Institute 2017) potentially leading faster to understanding between people and their ability to react to sudden changes. Regarding the power to act upon decisions, the organisational structure is of importance and beyond the scope of this research, however, the findings of the communication dynamic ‘team decision making’ are promising. Despite this research’s inconclusive findings, Museux et al. (2016) find that in the teams they studied, NVC can improve the process of shared decision making, partly by NVC bringing conciseness of communication and a shared language.

Other factors which may contribute to self-organisation are the system learning over time, which NVC supports, as discussed above. Also trust in employees will make it easier to let them make their own decisions, instead of needing all decisions to go through centralized control.

### *Common Meaning*

Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman (2017a, 37) state, “humans are a meaning-making and meaning-seeking species...this seems to be wired into our brains.” Without it, our brain “signals extreme discomfort and motivates the search for renewed purpose and hence meaning” (Kilinger 1998, 33). When it comes to a social system, such as an organisation it requires common meaning and a clear purpose in order to exist and thrive. A social system is a purposeful system (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a).

The data suggests that NVC can create shared understanding in one-to-one relationships by focussing on understanding one’s own needs and those of others. However, creating such a shared understanding of each other, does not necessarily lead to a shared overall purpose for the organisation or team. Finding this overall purpose can be a tricky process with potential conflicts and the exclusion of voices. The process of NVC can allow for the smoother management of the process to find common meaning, by creating a space in which everyone is heard.

Miyashiro and Rosenberg (2007) explain how NVC can go beyond process management and aid in creating the common meaning itself for a company, when it is used in the setting of the Integrated Clarity approach. This approach considers the needs of an organisation as a whole and its individual members. The researchers interview of Miyashiro implied that this approach can add further power to the effect of NVC on several of the communication dynamics in

organisations. As Integrated Clarity is outside the scope of this research, further research is required to find out what this integrated, systems-level use of NVC can mean for the AC of an organisation.

NVC is a model for interpersonal communication, which it improves primarily through an increased understanding of each other's feelings and needs. The effects it has on interpersonal relations expand onto the wider system of the organisation. As discussed above, NVC can directly support the adaptive capacity elements of diversity, trust and learning. The contribution of NVC to self-organisation and common meaning is less clear, but NVC seems to support those elements indirectly.



## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate and answer the question: “How does Nonviolent Communication support the adaptive capacity of organisations?”

The findings of this research suggest that NVC, used as a communication tool, has the ability to contribute to the different elements of adaptive capacity. The adaptive capacity elements, in this study, are supported by the effect NVC has on organisational communication dynamics. These dynamics in turn affect adaptive capacity. NVC has the potential to have a positive effect on all communication dynamics tested, especially ‘navigating interpersonal conflict’ and ‘giving and receiving feedback’. It achieves this improvement through an emphasis on listening to others and expressing oneself honestly in a concise language, which in turn brings greater understanding and progress in work related and relational issues. Specifically, by focusing on individual’s feelings and needs, when listening and expressing, conversations can be held in new ways and on topics that would not have been communicated before.

The central element of trust, which impacts all other elements of adaptive capacity, is improved by helping people to feel heard and therefore significant. The vulnerability required to communicate feelings and needs honestly also contributes to trust between members of the system, as vulnerability can increase trust. Learning is improved by allowing for more voices to contribute to the learning of the system. Also focusing on needs instead of judging behaviour reduces the fear of being vulnerable and admitting failure, which positively impacts learning. NVC directly contributes to the ability of a system to use its diversity by seeing each other’s needs to help resolve misunderstandings and by encouraging precise communication. Common meaning is indirectly improved by NVC’s potential impact on the process of forming a common meaning, due to its ability to resolve conflict and misunderstanding. Self-organisation is potentially improved with the additional input of feelings and needs, and a concise language encouraged by NVC that can aid the process of decision making. Also, an increase in trust can make it easier to allow colleagues to organise themselves.

With regards to the organisational context in which NVC is implemented, the more the language/structure of NVC is spread through an organisation, the more its effects of trust and understanding multiply. If NVC is known by most actors of a system, the ability/security to express and be heard increases. If an individual knows they are more likely to be heard, the courage barrier needed for the vulnerability of honest expression lowers. If people holding key positions in the system, such as managers, are trained, the positive effects that NVC has on learning can spread to other levels of the system. Another factor contributing to support safety of expression that was a pertinent outcome of the survey and interviews, is the deliberate creation of secure environments for practice, potentially under guidance of a facilitator.

These findings are of value for our key research audiences, NVC trainers and organisations seeking to improve their adaptive capacity. Findings offer important information to trainers of NVC who can use this research when considering NVC as a system level approach in organisations, by referring to adaptive capacity or by referring to its effects on specific communication dynamics. Additional findings of this study applicable to the trainers, who are already aware of the role needs play in impacting feelings and behaviour, are the insights presented in this thesis on the contextual factors needed to implement NVC successfully in an organisational setting and the implementation process itself.

Organisations looking to improve their resilience are definitely recommended to consider implementing NVC, but are cautioned to understand that it takes time and practice for individuals to become familiar with the method until it gets established at the organisational level as a shared language. Organisations should pay especial attention to contextual factors, such as spaces for practice and widespread knowledge of NVC, which are essential in making it such a shared language. NVC can be seen as a specific model with strict guidelines to be followed as a complete package. This research at three very different organisations, however, shows that it is adaptable to the organisational environment. This adaptability may be especially important for people who may be uncomfortable with the language of needs and feelings or the degree of vulnerability necessary to use NVC.

As outlined in the introduction to this paper, organisations form a key part of the social system, and their adaption to the rapid and unpredictable changes of the sustainability challenge is a necessity. Research on adaptive capacity shows the 5 elements that are needed in social systems facing change. NVC appears to be a communication tool of value to help organisations directly or indirectly support all 5 elements. This can help organisations in the face of change resulting from the effects of the sustainability challenge. Furthermore, it can allow organisations to more easily make the changes that are necessary to change the course of the sustainability challenge, and thereby help the social system as a whole.

## **5.1 Suggestions for further research**

During the course of this research several topics and insights arose which the researchers consider to be of value for further research.

As adaptive capacity of a social system, with the 5 elements that support it, as described by (Missimer, Robèrt, and Broman 2017a, 2017b) is a relatively new concept, not much research has been done yet on how communication influences those 5 elements. This research is a first exploration on how organisational communication can influence AC and how the specific communication tool of NVC can support the elements of AC of an organisation. The researchers suggest more research on how organisational communication influences the elements of AC, to further establish this link.

One especially promising topic for further research which arose were the theories of Miyashiro, expressed in the Change Handbook with Rosenberg (2007), ‘The Empathy Factor’ (Miyashiro 2011) and in an interview (2017) as part of this research. Miyashiro’s work is drawn from extensive work in international organisations, and explores, amongst other things, how NVC and the principles and assumptions behind it, can be applied on an organisational system level in an approach titled Integrated Clarity. By saying that NVC explores the needs of the ‘I’ and the ‘You’ she says that it is missing the needs at the level of the ‘We’ i.e. the group/team/organisational level. This approach, as it is concerned directly with the organisational systems level, offers new ways in which NVC can support the adaptive capacity of organisations, and further research is needed to look at how Integrated Clarity as an organisational culture, not a person-to-person practice can support the elements of adaptive capacity.

A further finding, which seems worthy of research are the mixed results with regards to the communication dynamic ‘Effective use of ICT’. Cox and Dannahy (2005) show the potential

of NVC for building meaningful relationships in e-mail communication. They state that explicitly naming feelings and needs can be effective to serve as a substitute to non-verbal cues. The value of NVC to ICT is supported by some responses to the employee survey, but overall NVC's effect on ICT received a low average score (+0.52). This unexpected outcome of results is of note and especially worthy of research due to the rise of e-communications in all its forms. A suggested research focus would be to look at whether NVC training and/or practice sessions explicitly reference e-mail and if/how NVC can support with the writing of effective emails.

Future research on NVC in organisations could be extended over a longer period of time in order to study an organisation before NVC training and at different intervals after implementation. Researchers could also take a more embedded approach to their research, operating at closer proximity to organisations. In this scenario greater consideration could be given to the contextual factors discussed in this research, such as the relevance of particular organisational structures; the ratio of trained to untrained staff; the extent and relevance of shared language; NVC training and management; and the views of those untrained in NVC. Included in these contextual considerations could be the scoping to include multiple industries, also competitive ones and non-western cultures.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Example of feelings vocabulary used in NVC training

A vocabulary sheet naming different terminology for feelings. These cards (or a variety of) are usually provided at any NVC training. Sheets are usually provided translated into native language of those on the course.

## Feelings when my needs are met

### CALM

relaxed  
serene  
tranquil  
peaceful  
quiet  
at ease  
comfortable

### COMPASSION

tender  
warm  
openhearted  
loving  
affection  
friendly  
sympathetic  
touched

### HAPPY

amused  
animated  
delighted  
glad  
joyful  
pleased

### REFRESHED

rested  
enlivened  
restored  
reactivated  
clearheaded

### LIVELY

excited  
enthusiastic  
eager  
energetic  
passionate  
vibrant  
blissful  
ecstatic  
radiant  
thrilled  
astonished  
amazed

### CURIOUS

fascinated  
interested  
involved  
engaged  
inspired

### GRATEFUL

appreciative  
thankful  
moved  
optimistic  
encouraged

### CONFIDENT

empowered  
open  
proud  
safe

## Feelings when my needs are NOT met

### CONFUSED

torn  
lost  
hesitant  
baffled  
perplexed  
puzzled

### BODY SENSATIONS

tense  
squeezed  
empty  
breathless  
choked  
shrink  
shaky  
pain  
sick  
weak

### UNCOMFORTABLE

troubled  
unsettled  
restless  
uncertain  
disquiet  
agitated  
disturbed  
cranky  
shocked  
surprised  
alert  
uneasy

### SAD

heavy hearted  
disappointed  
discouraged  
melancholy  
depressed  
gloomy  
pity  
longing  
despair  
helpless  
hopeless  
nostalgic

### BORED

disconnected  
alienated  
apathetic  
cold  
numb  
withdrawn  
impatient

### ANGRY

upset  
furious  
rage  
resentful

### HATE

dislike  
hostile  
aversion  
bitter  
disgusted  
scorn

### PAIN

hurt  
heartbroken  
lonely  
miserable  
suffer  
grief  
agony  
devastated  
regretful  
remorseful  
guilt  
turmoil

### ANNOYED

irritated  
frustrated  
impatient  
displeased  
exasperated

### FATIGUE

overwhelmed  
burnt-out  
exhausted  
sleepy  
tired

### JEALOUS

envious

## Nonviolent Communication

## Appendix B: Example of needs vocabulary used in NVC training

A vocabulary sheet naming different terminology for needs. These cards (or a variety of) are usually provided at any NVC training. Sheets are usually provided translated into native language of those on the course.

### Universal Basic Needs

**PHYSICAL WELL-BEING**

air  
food  
water  
light  
shelter / security /  
protection / safety /  
protection from pain /  
emotional safety /  
preservation  
movement / physical  
exercise  
rest / sleep  
touch  
sexual expression  
health  
comfort  
warmth

**CONNECTION**

care  
love  
closeness / intimacy  
compassion  
empathy  
consideration  
acceptance  
reassurance  
affection  
appreciation  
communication  
cooperation  
trust  
openness  
belonging  
community / companionship /  
partnership / fellowship  
inclusion / participation  
mutuality / reciprocity  
respect  
consistency / continuity  
nurturing  
support / help  
to know  
seeing (see / be seen)  
hearing (hear / be heard)  
understanding (understand /  
be understood)  
sharing / exchange  
giving / receiving  
tenderness / softness  
sensitivity / kindness

**MEANING**

purpose  
contribution / enrich life  
hope / faith  
self-value / self-confidence /  
self-esteem/dignity/  
having inner strength /  
power / competence /  
capacity / empowerment  
creativity  
learning  
inspiration  
challenge  
stimulation  
growth / evolution / progress  
efficacy / effectiveness  
expression / self-expression  
clarity  
awareness / consciousness  
liberation / transformation  
to matter / take part in /  
have my place in the world  
presence  
centeredness  
spirituality  
simplicity

**AUTONOMY**

choice  
freedom  
space  
time  
independence

**HONESTY**

authenticity  
integrity  
transparency

**PLAY**

fun  
celebration / mourning  
flow  
humor / laugh  
vitality / liveliness  
discovery / adventure  
passion  
spontaneity  
lightness  
variety / diversity

**HARMONY**

peace  
calm/relaxation /  
equanimity / tranquility  
ease  
beauty  
order  
communion / wholeness  
completion / digestion /  
integration  
predictability / familiarity  
stability / balance  
equality / justice / fairness



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## Appendix C: Overview of NVC trainers who were interviewed and their experience with NVC

List of NVC trainers interviewed and a description of their experience and key fields of expertise.

Name of Trainer	Country of Residence	Number of Years Teaching NVC	Area of interest/notes
NVC Trainer 1	Sweden	20+	Works on all kinds of levels and organisations, from individuals needing help in private life through to management teams and organisations.
NVC Trainer 2	Norway	N/A (Certification expected to be completed within 1 year)	Not certified in NVC but a very experienced conflict mediator and teacher.
NVC Trainer 3	The Netherlands	20+	Works in a business and municipality environment. Draws upon theatrical techniques to include and teach participants.
Marie Miyashiro	USA		Leading expert on using NVC and empathy in business. Author of “The Empathy Factor”.

## **Appendix D: Example of trainer interview questions**

List of prepared questions for semi-structured interviews with NVC trainers 1,2 and 3, and expert on empathy in organisations Marie Miyashiro.

### **Questions for interviews with NVC trainers (NVC trainer 1, 2 & 3)**

- What is NVC to you?
- What elements of NVC do you see and use?
- How is NVC used in organisations?
- Is NVC used differently in different organisations?
- How do you implement NVC in organisations? At what scale?
- What are organisation's motivations for adopting NVC?
- What are communication challenges in organisations? Can NVC solve them?
- (After explaining the 5 elements of adaptive capacity) Can you say how NVC relates to the 5 adaptive capacity elements?
- Is there any organisation that you can put us in touch with for our research?

### **Questions for the interview with Marie Miyashiro**

- What is the difference between empathy and the whole NVC package?
- What is the difference between NVC and the whole Integrated Clarity (IC) package?
- Do you think NVC in organisations is helpful without IC?
- What potential have you seen for NVC in organisations? Can you give any examples?
- Do you have an example that NVC did not work to its fullest in organisations? Why was that?
- How do you implement NVC in (big) organisations?
- How long does it take to embed NVC in individuals? - Organisations?
- Why do organisations adopt NVC?
- According to your experience what type of organisations uses NVC?
- Is there a difference when NVC is implemented in different cultures? Or locations? Or industries?
- When you look at the quantitative results that we found for the effects of NVC on the communication dynamics, do you find these results surprising?
- Is there a clash when only some employees in an organisation are trained in NVC?
- Did you see some trends with regards to NVC in organisations over your career? How and where?

## Appendix E: Example of employee survey question

Screenshot of survey sent to employees of sample organisations. A question like this was asked for each communication dynamic with a short definition. After the ratings question there was an opportunity to expand the answer with an open ended question.

### Survey on NVC in Organisations

\* Required

#### Working together within a diverse staff team

Teams require shared understanding to work together effectively. This shared understanding can be difficult to achieve with diverse groups. Diversity includes ages, languages, genders, backgrounds, religions, working styles, expertise, etc.

Please rate how, if at all, NVC influences the communication challenges related to 'working with diversity' in your organisation? \*

- ☐ NVC has a very positive effect on this
- ☒ NVC has a positive effect on this
- ☐ NVC has no effect on this
- ☐ NVC has a negative effect on this
- ☐ NVC has a very negative effect on this
- ☐ I have no experience of NVC in this context

Expanding on your selection above, can you share one short example about a time when NVC did, or did not, contribute towards dealing with this communication dynamic within your organisation?

## Appendix F: Survey coding structure

List of all codes, with description, used for coding the qualitative data emerging from the open questions of the employee survey. These codes were also used as guidelines for analyzing interviews.

Code	Description
<b>Components of NVC used</b>	
4 steps of NVC	Mentions all 4 steps of NVC (observation, feelings, needs, request)
NVC step: Observation	Directly mentions observation(s)
NVC step: Feelings	Directly mentions feeling(s) or emotion(s)
NVC step: Needs	Directly mentions need(s)
NVC step: Request	Directly mentions request(s)
Communication mode: Self-connection	Refers to connection to oneself or listening to oneself
Communication mode: Listening	Refers to listening to the other
Communication mode: Expressing	Refers to expressing themselves
Empathy	Refers to empathy directly or in a wording which implies empathy's use.
Taking responsibility for feelings	Refers to taking responsibility for own feelings
Recognizing judgement	Refers to recognizing judgements. One's own or other's
<b>Effects of NVC</b>	
Increased understanding	Refers to the ability to better understand a situation and/or person due to NVC. Includes, nuance.
More awareness	Refers to changed awareness of people or situations, due to using NVC.
Progress in work and/or relationship related issues	Refers to the ability to move forward positively in a situation, either regarding work tasks or personal relations. Also includes reference to working more effectively or efficiently.
Space for conversations that were not held before	Refers to the use of NVC to create conversations not previously possible. E.g. easier conversations, 'speaking the unspoken', or breaking silence
Increased openness and sharing	Refers to emotional opening up to others or willingness to connect
Higher ability to see/work with different perspectives and working styles	Refers to being able to better communicate with people holding different perspectives or working in different ways to oneself.
Sense of safety	Refers to the use of NVC creating an increased feeling of safety
Space for honesty	Refers to honesty with innerself and with others
Sense of connection	Specifically naming connection as an effect

<b>Communication Dynamics/</b>	
Working in a diverse team	Refers to Working together within a diverse team
Giving and receiving feedback	Refers to Giving and receiving constructive feedback
Effective use of ICT	Refers to Effective use of Information Communication Technology
NOT ICT	Refers to not using NVC in ICT
Team decision making	Refers to Team decision making
Sharing feelings in the workplace	Refers to Space for sharing feelings and being open in the workplace
Different levels of power	Refers to Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation
Internal competition	Refers to Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments
Navigating interpersonal conflict	Refers to Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict
<b>Context/setting (when/where NVC is used, or not)</b>	
Secure environment needed	Refers to the need for a 'safe/secure environment' to practice NVC. Can include reference to 'space' being needed.
NVC Requires Practice	Refers to the need for, and/or the ability to practice NVC
Shared NVC Language	Refers to the presence or lack of presence of a shared language/understanding to be able to use NVC.
Facilitator Present	Refers to situations in which a facilitator is present. The facilitator can be a professional or someone nominated for that circumstance.
Context: time needed for NVC conversation	Refers to whether there is time to apply NVC or not
Organisational structure	Refers to the structure in which NVC is applied
<b>Other</b>	
Challenge to apply NVC	Refers to someone expressing it is a challenge to apply NVC or to get positive effects when applying NVC in/due to a certain situation

## **Appendix G: Example employee interview questions**

List of pre-prepared questions for semi-structured interviews with employees at sample organisations after the completion and coding of survey.

### **Questions for the interviews with School employees**

- Does NVC add to the resilience of individuals or the organisation as a whole?
- How long does it take for the new teachers to be able to use NVC?
- How does NVC support learning in general?
- What would you miss if you would use NVC without the sociocretic structure?
- What makes your colleagues feel safe, have the space to share?
- How does NVC support with decision making in your school?
- Which elements of NVC do you use the most?

### **Questions for Employees (NGO, Research institute)**

- Can you please tell us about your experience with NVC so far?
- Are you able to apply NVC in your daily life?
- What is it like to talk NVC with those who have not been trained?
- What is it like when someone applies NVC when talking to you?
- What space do you have for practice?
- How embedded is NVC in your organisations?
- Do you see benefits from colleagues who are practicing NVC. Or do you experience any difference?
- Which elements of NVC would you say you use the most?
- When you express how a situation makes you feel, do you follow up with needs and a request?
- What do you think was the reason for your organisation to offer NVC trainings?
- How is NVC used in your organisation? Primarily in one to one meetings? Or in team meetings? Or differently?
- Which are the steps you feel most or less comfortable with?
- How often do you join the space for NVC practice in your organisation?



## Appendix H: Communications dynamics with descriptions, sub-dynamics and references

This table shows a list of the 8 communication dynamics used to test NVCs effectiveness in organisations (including a 9<sup>th</sup> dynamic ‘Navigating the professional/informal relationship line’ which was removed prior to distributing employee survey). The table provides a full title of each dynamic as well as the description used in the employee survey. In the right hand column examples of challenges/dynamics from the literature (with their references) are named. These examples from literature were used by the researchers to form the communication dynamic titles, and descriptions, used in the rest of this research.

Communication Dynamic	Description	Examples and references
Working together within a diverse staff team	Teams require shared understanding to work together effectively. This shared understanding can be difficult to achieve with diverse groups. Diversity includes ages, languages, genders, backgrounds, religions, working styles, expertise, etc.	Formal communication vs informal communication (Hedman and Valo 2015); Language Barriers and forms of communication (Brett et al. 2006) New hires (Asma Zaineb 2016); Cultural subtleties (Eisenberg et al. 2016); Cultural diversity (Vangen 2017)
Giving and receiving constructive feedback	This question is about managers or team members giving and receiving constructive feedback, in formal and informal settings, to improve ones work or working environment.	Formal communication vs informal communication (Hedman and Valo 2015); Communicating boredom (Thompson 2009); Language Barriers (Asma Zaineb 2016). Information overload (Eisenberg et al); Both deviation-counteracting and deviation-amplifying feedback needed (Eisenberg et al. 2016); lifeless appraisals focused on narrow evaluations not aspects of identity (Laloux 2014)
Effective use of Information Communication Technology	ICT, (e.g. email) has created new options for communication which bring its own possibilities and challenges. E.g. due to lack of face-to-face contact, it can create feelings of disconnection.	Formal communication vs informal communication (Hedman and Valo 2015). Face-to-face communication vs ICT assisted communication (Hedman and Valo 2015); ‘Urgent Organisations’ shortening customer/staff response times (Eisenberg et al. 2016);
Team decision making	In order to make well informed decisions, it is important to create a space for all voices to be heard.	Groupthink (Jones and Roelofsma 2000). False consensus effect (Jones and Roelofsma 2000). Group polarization (Jones and Roelofsma 2000). Group escalation of commitment (Jones and Roelofsma 2000). lack of clarity in the decision-making process, participation in decision making and the absence of joint decisions (Jones and Roelofsma 2000) Equally distributed participation vs polarized participation (Hedman and Valo 2015) Consensus decision-making vs unilateral decision-making (Hedman and Valo 2015) Language Barriers (Asma Zaineb 2016); ‘scripts’ lead to Non-equitable exchange of ideas (Eisenberg et al. 2016); assumption of all ideas being implemented and lack of closure (Eisenberg et al. 2016)
Space for sharing feelings and being open in the workplace	Humans are emotional beings, affected by circumstances inside and outside of work. This is not always considered or communicated in work environments.	Formal communication vs informal communication (Hedman and Valo 2015) Negative humor and sarcasm.(Thompson 2009) Communicating boredom (Thompson 2009); Personal Issues (Asma Zaineb 2016); Talking seen as ‘interfering with productivity’ (Eisenberg et al. 2016); learned behaviours guard against intimate disclosure (Eisenberg et al. 2016); Professional mask hides vulnerability (Laloux 2014); Fear of embracing individuality

		leading to chaos (Laloux 2014)
Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation	Interactions and language used between different positions in an organisation are influenced by the different levels of power that come with those positions.	Jockeying for power (Thompson 2009); Language Barriers (Asma Zaineb 2016); Strategic ambiguity (Eisenberg et al. 2016) deniability and preservation of status quo by power positions (Eisenberg et al. 2016); suppression of voices leading to sabotage/whistle blowing (Eisenberg et al. 2016); untransparency of information (Laloux 2014)
Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments	Internal competition for positions, resources, budget, information, etc. can lead to strategic use of language and relationships.	Debating expertise (Thompson 2009); Language Barriers (Thompson 2009); Increased pressure for constant staff availability (Eisenberg et al. 2016); Power as scarcity leads to mistrust, fear, greed and/or resignation, resentment lack of motivation (Laloux 2014)
Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict	Conflict can be either explicit or implicit. We also consider experienced tension due to subliminal and unspoken conflicts as conflict.	Communicating boredom (Thompson 2009); Language Barriers (Asma Zaineb 2016)
Navigating the professional / informal relationship line	Work relationships often have many dimensions at the same time, e.g. friend and manager, mentor and colleague.	Communicating boredom (Thompson 2009); Language Barriers. Personal Issues (Asma Zaineb 2016). Formal communication vs informal communication (Hedman and Valo 2015); Blended relationships (Conrad and Poole 2002)

## Appendix I: Communication dynamics to adaptive capacity relationships table

This table shows the communication dynamics in relationship to the 5 elements of adaptive capacity. Researchers asked themselves the question ‘How does X communication dynamic influence, positively or negatively, X element of adaptive capacity?’ The upper row shows a description, sourced from literature, of how each element is influenced in a system and why it is important. Each relationship box holds a + and/or – symbol, these were guides for the researchers to understand the nature of the relationship and the communication dynamics contribution.

Communication Dynamics to Adaptive Capacity Table					
Communication Dynamics	Diversity	Common Meaning	Trust	Learning	Self-Organisation
	Having variety and as many options as possible allows for a system to be resilient in the long run. Different perspectives contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the system. Missimer et al. (2017a)	A social system requires a clear purpose in order to exist and thrive. It allows for navigation of complexity. Missimer et al. (2017a)	Trust acts as system glue. Trust is derived from trustworthiness which is made up from seeing individuals; ability or competence; motivations of benevolence; integrity/consistency. Individuals feel trusted if they feel significant, competent and liked. Rob��t et al. (2015)	Learning as a system means to be able to sense changes and respond to them effectively. This includes social memory and the capacity to learn from experience, as a mechanism. Missimer et al. (2017a)	Self-organization is the ability of a system to organize itself without system level intent or centralized control. Self-Organization is essential for individuals and systems to adapt quickly. Missimer et al. (2017a)
<b>Working together within a diverse staff team</b>	(+) Being able to work together in a diverse staff team increases the likelihood that a team can profit of all the benefits that having a diverse team brings, namely the different ideas and viewpoints.	(-) Diverse teams can make it difficult to find a shared understanding and therefore identify and unite around a common meaning.	(+) Each individual has a diverse range of motivations, competencies and consistency of behaviour. The more able one is to express these to the team then the more likely to receive understanding and therefore an increase in trust within the system. Being able to work well together will increase trust.	(+) The ability to work well together in diverse teams implies the ability to learn from each other’s experiences and to learn as a team.	(+ - ) Diversity potentially aids in self-organisation as a task is likely to require multiple inputs of different skills. However, it is necessary that these skills are used to reach a common goal. Finding this common goal/shared understanding can be a challenge in a diverse team.

<b>Giving and receiving constructive feedback</b>	<p>(+) Being able to give and receive constructive feedback enables people to learn from and work with the diversity that is present in their organisation. Feedback also informs the relevance of specific opinions and skills for the needs of the collective system.</p>	<p>(+) If feedback is incorporated into the common meaning, then a sense of ownership of the common meaning is more likely and stronger. This is motivating.</p>	<p>(+ - ) Feedback allows to get a sense of one's own competences and level of significance in the views of other people. This understanding can increase trust. If feedback is false or expressed as blame or a judgement, the level of trust between two colleagues is likely to decline.</p>	<p>(+) Feedback is essential in testing responses suitability to a situation. Therefore allowing the individuals and the system to learn and adapt over time.</p>	<p>(+) Feedback is needed to ensure a response is suitable. This feedback coming from within the system members removes the need for feedback from centralized control enabling the organisation to adapt more swiftly.</p>
<b>Effective use of Information Communication Technology</b>	<p>(+) ICT provides potential for a great increase of diversity of voices heard as stakeholders of a system are able to contribute ideas and views. E.g. customers, colleagues at a distance, experts, etc.</p>	?	<p>(-) Use of ICT can affect the 'quality of connection' between individuals. Where individuals may not feel 'known' when communicating in a medium that lacks reading of body language, etc. this can decrease trust.</p>	<p>(+) ICT allows for a system to learn by sourcing input. Furthermore, ICT can allow for effective communication of new learning, so that other people in the organisation also know and can adapt.</p>	<p>(+) ICT can allow for quicker self-organisation as it makes communication easier and quicker.</p>

<b>Team decision making</b>	(+ - ) The structure of decision making affects if and how diverse ideas and responses are considered or not.	(+) Making decisions in such a way that everybody understands why and how they were derived will support people to align with the common meaning of an organisation.	(+ - ) Creating a space for all voices allows for understanding of motivations and therefore interpersonal trust. Not knowing why people make a certain decision, can decrease the level of trust.	(-) If a team as a whole is not able to see or use new information, decisions that are taken are not likely to support the desired learning and adaptation of the organisation.	(+ - ) Being able to make suitable decisions effectively as a team allows for quick self-organisation without needing to pass a decision by the centralized control. However, team decision making also has the potential to take so much time that it undermines quick self-organisation.
<b>Space for sharing feelings and being open in the workplace</b>	(+) Allowing for expression of feelings increases the type of contributions and motivations per individual. (If there was no space for expression of feelings before).	(+) Humans are a meaning making species. Being able to share feelings related to the purpose of the organisation can inform the common meaning of an organisation. Also general sharing of feelings in the workplace might inform this common meaning.	(+) Feelings often inform our motivations. Transparency of feelings can influence trust.	(+) Feelings are part of the holistic makeup of a system and so must be expressed in order to learn about (what is behind) those feelings and be able to respond to them. Furthermore, feelings about a topic might influence one's motivation to learn.	(+) Feelings influence decision making. If there is openness and understanding of the feelings between an organisation's members then the decision can be made faster, hence facilitating for faster self-organisation.
<b>Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation</b>	Strict power positions in an organisation can lead to expression of ideas and responses only from a powerful minority, thereby limiting diversity.	(-) When people in the lower levels of a hierarchy do not have any influence on the common meaning of an organisation, they might not feel very connected to it or motivated to work towards it.	People may be viewed solely on their role/position and this is a potential barrier to being known, liked, and trusted on a personal level. Additionally, thinking that people might do things in a certain way solely to protect their position, can decrease the level of trust.	(-) Strict power positions in an organisation can lead to expression of ideas and responses only from a powerful minority, thereby restricting the learning of different parts of the organisation feeding into the whole. This disables an organisation to adapt properly.	(-) The distribution of power among members of a system influences responsibility. If only a certain group has all the power, self-organisation by other members is inhibited.



<b>Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments</b>	(+ -) Due to competition it is unlikely that diverse members of organisations will cooperate effectively. Limiting the potential contribution of diversity to the system. Alternatively, competition can create pressure forcing people to draw upon diversity to respond e.g. via innovation.	(-) If there is competition between departments, the common meaning of a department can eclipse the common meaning of the organisation.	(-) Deliberate and strategic use of language and relationships to gain an advantage over others can lead to mistrust of motivations. Motivations are possibly for individual gain and not benevolence.	(+ -) Due to internal competition, people are likely to withhold information from each other, influencing the ability of an organisation to learn and adapt. Alternatively, competition can create pressure forcing people within the organisation to learn how to adapt to the situation. e.g. via innovation.	(+ -) Responses to a situation rely on cooperation, coercion or other tactical options. If there is competition within a system this affects, positively or negatively, the number and type of possible self-organised responses.
<b>Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict</b>	(+) Conflict often comes into existence due to diverse points of view and not being able to find common ground. Being able to resolve conflict will increase the likelihood that diverse opinions can be taken into consideration and contribute to the organisation.	(+) Being in conflict will decrease the chance that people want to work towards the same purpose together. It might disable people to see their common meaning. Also it is less likely that people can find common meaning when they are in a conflict.	(+) Conflict is not intrinsically a source of mistrust, depending on cause, process and intention of conflict. Not being able to resolve a conflict likely decreases the level of trust in the other person, also in areas that are not related to the topic of the conflict.	(+) When in conflict, people are likely to withhold information from each other, influencing the ability of an organisation to learn and adapt.	(+) When in conflict, responses that require cooperation are less likely to be used, inhibiting the number and types of responses.

## Appendix J: Quantitative data from employee survey

This table shows the quantitative data from the employee survey. The relationship of NVC to each communication dynamic was asked with a potential rating of -2 to +2, the average score is shown here. Respondents also had the option to answer 'no experience' with regards to their experience of NVC to that communication dynamic, this data is also shown as a percentage of total respondents. Standard deviation is shown in the column titled SD.

	NGO Total 25 responses			Research Institute Total 7 responses			School Total 8 responses			Total 40 responses		
	Me an	SD	No Experie nce	Me an	SD	No Experie nce	Me an	SD	No Experie nce	Me an	SD	No Experie nce
Working together within a diverse staff team	1,00	0,52	8%	1,00	0,00	14%	1,75	0,43	0%	1,16	0,55	7,5%
Giving and receiving constructive feedback	1,14	0,64	12%	1,29	0,49	0%	1,57	0,49	25%	1,25	0,60	12,5%
Effective use of ICT	0,44	0,63	36%	0,33	0,52	14%	0,86	0,64	0%	0,52	0,63	25%
Team decision making	0,72	0,57	28%	0,83	0,41	14%	1,00	0,87	0%	0,81	0,64	20%
Space for sharing feelings and being open in the workplace	1,25	0,44	4%	1,00	0,00	14%	1,88	0,33	0%	1,34	0,48	5%
Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation	0,71	0,59	32%	1,00	0,00	28%	1,25	0,83	0%	0,90	0,66	25%
Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments	0,44	0,63	36%	1,00	0,71	28%	1,40	0,49	25%	0,73	0,72	7,5%
Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict	1,25	0,44	4%	1,00	0,63	14%	1,86	0,35	12,5%	1,32	0,53	7,5%

## Appendix K - Coding structure total numbers - survey.

This table shows all codes of the qualitative data from the employee survey. Totals of codes are broken down by communication dynamic.

	Diversity	Feedback	ICT	Decision Making	Sharing Feelings	Power	Competition	Conflict	TOTAL
<b>Components of NVC Used</b>									
4 steps of NVC	1	2	1						4
NVC step: Observation	1	4	1		1		1		8
NVC step: Feelings	5	3		2	9	1		1	21
NVC step: Needs	7	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	18
NVC step: Request		1	1					1	3
Communication mode: Self-connection	3				3				6
Communication mode: Listening	7	3		5	3	3		4	25
Communication mode: Expressing	7	19	6	5	11	7	2	9	66
Empathy	5	4		1	4	3		3	20
Taking responsibility for feelings		1			2				3
Recognizing judgment	2	4			1			3	10
<b>Effects of NVC</b>									
Increased understanding	10	8	2	3	4	1		9	37
More awareness	1	3	2	1	3	1	1	3	15
Progress in work and relationship related issues	8	10	6	8	9	5	2	11	59
Space for conversations that were not held before	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	5	17
Increased openness and sharing	4	6		3	13	1		1	28
Higher ability to see/work with different perspectives and working styles	7	3		3	2	1		2	18



Sense of safety	1	3			1	6			1	12
Space for honesty	2	3	1			2				8
Sense of connection	7		2			2			2	13
<b>Communication Dynamics/ reasons for using NVC (x13)</b>										
Working in a diverse team					2					2
Giving and receiving feedback	2					1	1			4
Effective use of ICT									1	1
NOT ICT			5							5
Team decision making							1			1
Sharing feelings in the workplace										
Different levels of power						1				1
Internal competition								1	1	2
Navigating interpersonal conflict	1							2		3
<b>Context/setting (when/where NVC is used, or not)</b>										
Secure environment needed	4	4			4	4			4	20
NVC Requires practice	5	2	1			2			4	14
Shared NVC language	2	1				4	2			9
Facilitator present	1	2			2	2		1	3	11
context: time needed for NVC conversation	1				1	1				3
Organisational structure	2	5	1		7	5	4	2	5	31
<b>Other</b>										
Challenge to apply NVC	3	1	4			1	2	1	3	15

## Appendix L - Quotes from employee survey

This table provides additional quotes, from the qualitative data set, to those presented in the results section of this thesis. Presented here by communication dynamic as well as additional quotes which refer to challenges related to using NVC. These challenges are selected from data across the communication dynamics.

Working with diversity	A colleague who does not take deadlines into account --> I have called attention to the consequences of this and to my own feelings and to my need for more structure.	Help solve problems in some cases of miscommunication, because of better understanding of the underlying needs of the other person.	E.g. we are now starting up a program in Uganda, and my need is a well-structured process, while some of the partners in Uganda like to 'go with the flow'. By looking at their needs, and trying to align them to mine, we can move on.	I feel in a diverse team making sure everyone feels heard is especially important.	we have formed an 'intervisie' group to help each other understand and formulate feelings and needs to effectively communicate with others
Giving and receiving constructive feedback	A couple of people are quick to anger. I always pay extra attention to using the (NVC) method in the right way and not judging their behaviour, but only describing what is my need and how I feel.	it is being made concrete by the sender, which is why it is easier to receive it (or understand it). This is valid for both giving and receiving.	This way you keep observation and feelings separated - and you keep it close to yourself. As a result the "feedback" is not received negatively by the other.	I recently had a performance review with my manager, in which I felt NVC helped me a lot. It made it easier to receive both positive and negative feedback.	All things can be said, even in jackal. There's always someone who can mediate or translate in giraffe
Effective use of ICT	this would be possible, if I have more experience with it [NVC]. Now the text in an email is still a little too much black-and-white/unnanced.	I only use email for formal communication, as soon as we seem to end up in a discussion I stop mailing and choose to have a personal conversation.	I am using NVC regularly in my mails, e.g. when trying to get something done from someone who I cannot speak to in person. I then try to connect my needs to the needs of the other person. It helps!	After my most recent NVC training I started writing NVC style thank you's in some emails and they were clearly experienced in a much more positive light than classic thank you's, which tend to be formalities.	
Team decision making	things are being mentioned, that earlier on would remain un-mentioned.	It is easier to talk about difficult things in a good way and therefore better decisions can be made.	I think so. So that you get to know better the arguments/reasoning underlying an idea. This brings interests to the surface, which can	less talking, more listening to one another	We already work with CONSENT, a sociocratic decisionmaking model. NVC adds to this by giving

			more readily convince another person.		space to pain, frustration, anger, etc.
Sharing Feelings and openness	Especially because you keep it close to yourself - you can share your own feelings and openness about this - without attacking the other.	[NVC] gives me the courage to do so and knowing others have done the training, where it is coming from	Emotions have a large influence on how you function. This is why it can be important to know from each other which emotions are at play at a given moment. Communication will improve because of this.	With NVC the threshold to name emotions becomes lower.	[NVC] gives me the courage to do so and knowing others have done the training, where it is coming from
Different power levels	yes instead of getting frustrated, look at how the other person would like the situation to be and what we can do to both be happy with the outcome	I think there is better understanding and more mutual respect.	Openness, making things open to discussion	I was able to express myself to my manager regarding unease without him/her feeling affected/threatened in his/her power position. On the contrary, when I called for help/support I got what I needed.	depends on whether everyone applies this
Internal competition	looking at 'competition' from a healthy perspective not defensive	As long as most people put their own interest ahead of that of the group/organization, people will play games to make themselves appear better than the rest.			Due to form of organization we have chosen with NVC and sociocracy with full transparency, these issues get addressed quickly and we resolve our conflicts peacefully
Navigating Conflict	Conflicts are generally about expectations and misunderstandings and NVC helps in getting these out of the way.	It brought underlying needs to the surface, through which it became clear what was the cause/essence of the conflict.	(There was a) hurt, angry employee who felt misunderstood and unheard. Having a conversation made a lot of difference, because this person felt heard.	E.g. the other day I had to ask someone to shorten a piece for the annual report, which he had already shortened twice. I knew he wouldn't be happy about this, so I used nvc in my request. It worked!	In this, I notice that I'm still a beginner with NVC. The application of NVC in conflict situations, costs me a lot of energy.

Challenges	If not everyone practices NVC your efforts will not pay off	Applying NVC in a one on one situation is easier for me.	I have the notion that feedback is being given in a way that is too careful or too positive, which is why perhaps too few critical comments are being shared.	NVC in my opinion is mostly for personal contact/communication. E-mailing is friendly and effective. Observing via email I find difficult.	
	Not everyone needs to be heard. On the contrary, everyone has his/her own expertise and responsibility. Let's make effective decisions. We are not a group of friends, but a working environment.	If this is guided well by someone who gives all participants the space to say his or her thing, this can make it easier to take a decision.	I've become more alert about empathically listening to people, but it doesn't really work the other way around when talking to untrained people. People tend to offer sympathy and other ineffective strategies.	it is challenging to apply NVC in a setting with unequal power positions. There is a threshold to start a conversation in a different way all of a sudden.	
	Unfortunately, the managers who need it, aren't doing the NVC training. On your own you can make things move, but the effect would be trippled if both managers and employees would apply NVC.	I think people are sometimes more aware and I see people using NVC....but not sure how sustainable this is when the going gets tough - I already notice some slack			





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