

NVC and Communication in Organisations

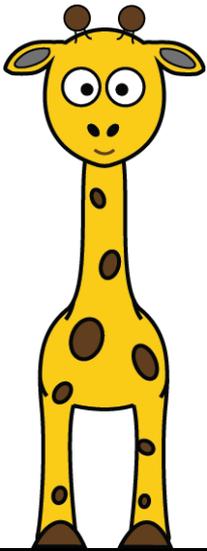
Summary of thesis results

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) has the potential to have a positive effect on all communication dynamics tested. An emphasis on listening to others and expressing oneself honestly in a concise language brings greater trust, greater understanding and also progress in work related and relational issues. Specifically, by focusing on individual's feelings and needs, conversations can be held in new ways and on topics that would not have been communicated before.

Organisations are cautioned to understand that it takes time and practice for individuals to become familiar with NVC. Organisations should pay attention to contextual factors, such as the creation of a 'shared language' via widespread knowledge of NVC.

The more the language/structure of NVC is spread through an organisation, the more its effects of trust and understanding multiply. 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, such as managers, are trained, the positive effects that NVC has on learning can spread to other levels of the system. Another contextual factor is the deliberate creation of secure environments for practice, potentially under guidance of a facilitator which supports safety needed for expression.

NVC can be seen as having strict guidelines to be followed. However, this research, at three very different organisations, shows it is adaptable. This adaptability may be especially important for people uncomfortable with the language of needs and feelings or degrees of vulnerability necessary.



Research

We surveyed and interviewed employees of 3 organisations which each practice NVC in the workplace. NVC's effect on communication dynamics were rated from -2 to +2 and quotes from responses, a sample displayed here, were analyzed to determine 'how' NVC contributes.

Effective use of ICT. Average score: +0.52. "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." - However - "when people say NVC has no effect it just makes me wonder if they know how to contextualize those principles into an email"

Score and quotes for each communication dynamic

Space for sharing feelings and being open in the workplace.

Average score: +1.34. "[NVC] gives me the courage to do so and knowing others have done the training, where it is coming from"

Navigating and resolving interpersonal conflict. Average score: +1.32. "Because of better understanding of underlying needs we can resolve easier any type of interpersonal conflict."

Giving and receiving constructive feedback. Average score: +1.25. "This way you keep observation and feelings separated, and you keep it close to yourself. As a result the "feedback" is not received negatively"

Working together within a diverse staff team. Average score: +1.16. "In a diverse team making sure everyone feels heard is especially important."

Different levels of power due to different positions in the organisation. Average score: +0.91. "I was able to express myself to my manager without him feeling threatened in his power position. When I called for help I got what I needed."

Team decision making. Average score: +0.81 "less talking, more listening to one another"; and "NVC challenges you to express yourself and creates a safe environment to do this."

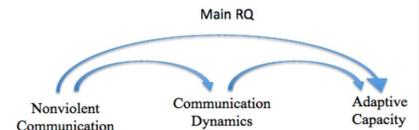
Internal competition between colleagues and/or departments. Average score: +0.73. "You notice that in conflicts, everybody is more aware about their own part and can feel where it comes from. As a result, many conversations start with a reflection on their own part, rather than the part of the other."

NVC and the Adaptive Capacity of Organisations

Adaptive Capacity

Adaptive capacity (AC) is a concept to describe the resilience of 'social systems' - whether a team, an organisation, a city and so on - and it is the framework through which we sought to understand NVC's potential overall significance.

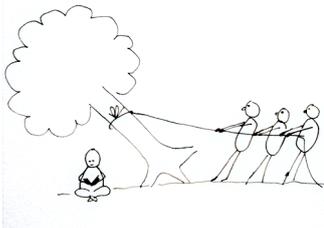
The more AC the more a system can deal with change and be resilient. Change affecting organisations can be sudden or predictable and more or less severe. It can come from a change in the external market conditions, a conflict within a team, a change of organisational policy, a change of team-members, etc.



How we communicate affects Adaptive capacity

Adaptive Capacity is supported by appropriately developing and using 5 elements: Learning, Trust, Diversity, Common meaning and Self-organization (for more information see Missimer et al. (2017)).

Effects of NVC on the different elements of AC



Trust

The central element of trust, which impacts all other elements, is improved by helping people to feel heard and therefore significant. The vulnerability required to communicate feelings and needs honestly also contributes to trust.



Learning

Learning of the system is improved by allowing for more voices to contribute. Also focusing on needs instead of judging behavior reduces the fear of being vulnerable and admitting failure, which positively impacts learning.



Diversity

NVC contributes to the ability of a system to use its diversity by helping to resolve misunderstandings and by encouraging precise communication with a shared language.



Self-organisation

Self-organisation and decision making is potentially improved with the additional input of feelings and needs, and a concise language encouraged by NVC. Also, an increase in trust can make it easier for management to allow colleagues to organise themselves.



Common Meaning (or goal)

Creation of common meaning is indirectly improved by NVC's impact on the process of forming a common meaning, due to its ability to resolve conflict and misunderstanding.