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Communication in the Management Process - Productive Communication

Abstract

Communication as a process of information sharing is a key segment of all management functions. Insufficient or poor-quality information sharing suggests unproductive communication. Globalization and development of modern, sophisticated technologies allow management to adapt and create productive work communication. Considering the statements above, in this paper, the emphasis will be on showing aspects of productive communication considering a maritime organization reflecting metacommunication as a tool for improving communication skills. This paper will descriptively explain the process of communication in the organization, the ways and actions a manager must take as his activities in the function of business success, and how to improve communication to maximize productivity with the main goal of incorporating metacommunication in an organization. For such, pilot research was conducted on Graduate students of the Faculty of Maritime Studies in Split, majoring in Maritime Management (imagining students as employees and professors as managers), which showed that 75% know the concept of metacommunication, but only 51% use metacommunication with their colleagues as a part of productive communication.

Keywords: communication, metacommunication, management, organizational skills, maritime industry, productive communication.

Introduction

If one should look up the simplest possible definition of communication, it would be described as a simple message transmission from person A to person B [19]. Even though that is true, communication itself holds much more than just being a simple conversation. The process of communication expects the exchange of information between at least two subjects who unequally influence each other and use various symbols to convey their message as successfully as possible [12]. It is then

understandable that there must be a certain reason for communicating and how it is never completely predictable - what is said does not have to be the same as initially expected [7]. The way one interacts with people defines and characterizes them, determines their identity, and sets them apart from everyone else – a person feels true to himself only in relation to others, in his actions on others, and in the actions of others on himself [17].

Even though in the process of successful communication the most important is the exchange of information and understanding of the same, communication consists of nine main elements: the sender, message encoding, the message itself, message medium or channel, message recipient, message decoding, and interference in the communication channel. *A sender* is a person who sends the message to another person, group, or organization, and they need to know if the recipient knows them, how they experience it, and what kind of response is expected. *The coding of a message* refers to the organization of thoughts and the composition of symbols that will convey that message. The sender and recipient must be on the same symbolic level for the message to be successfully conveyed. *The message* is content composed of symbols that are exchanged between sender and recipient and must be understandable, accurate, and clear. *The media/channel* is the chosen transmitter of the message from the sender to the recipient. It is important to know which media the recipient has at his disposal, how long the recipient's exposure to a certain medium is and whether the message will be remembered [12, 14]. *The recipient of a message* is an individual, a group, or an organization expected to be familiar with the sender of the message. *Decoding a message* is a process that reveals the meaning of the message. *The reaction of the recipient of the message* refers to the behaviors during and after receiving the message [14]. *Feedback* refers to the recipient's response sent back to the sender. The sender may or may not receive the message and may receive it late. Once the feedback is sent, the roles change and it rotates until the communication stops [12]. In a situation where two people see one other, it's hard not to communicate. Everything has the value of a message, whether it is movement or inactivity, words or silence [20]. *Communication interferences* are various distortions of the message, mostly actions of slowing down or losing the message, and are the result of poor and unproductive business communication [12, 14]. Every communication has content as well as a relative aspect. This indicates that while communication transmits information, it also imposes behavior. The content of a message is equivalent in human communication to the report component of the message because it delivers information. It could be about anything that can be communicated, whether the information is accurate, false, valid, invalid, or undecidable. The command component, on the other hand, refers to the nature of the message and, as a result, the communicants' relationship [20].

Business communication

Business or corporate communication is an exchange of information between a company and its employees based on an examination of the structure and operation of communication networks and systems. Since an organization cannot function without communication, business communication necessitates a wide range of knowledge and abilities, as well as a high level of professionalism, precision, correctness, and quality. Since communication presents a taught set of skills, as such it must be regularly upgraded. Within the business, communication provides instructions, informs, directs, evaluates, trains, influences, and orients individuals towards strengthening the company's market position [13].

Communication as an activity for managers

A modern manager deals with the activities of leadership, communication, employee motivation, and interpersonal relationships in group dynamics. Communication is an activity that intertwines through the other three listed, and without it, a manager cannot lead a group of people or even an entire company. Successful communication is considered part of a managerial leadership skills strategy [6]. All departments and employees must be kept up to date on what they need to know to work efficiently. Improvements in internal working efficiency result in savings and profit [18].

Communication skills are constantly upgraded and harmonized with the requirements of the interlocutor and relate to interpersonal communication, presentational communication, and negotiation. *Interpersonal communication* includes corporate communication skills and active listening. *Presentative communication* is a skill that is learned and improved through constant repetition and is presented as speaking in front of a larger group of people, which causes most people feelings of discomfort, nervousness, and stress. It is important to improve the skills of non-verbal communication, i.e., to show relaxation, accessibility, and self-confidence through body language, and most importantly it is vital to prepare well and be focused during the presentation of a particular idea. *Negotiation* is a skill that can be performed individually or in a team and achieves the interest of one party while both try to reach the set goal with various communication tools [2, 6]. Other levels of organizational communication, aside from interpersonal and other previously described, include group-level communication, communication on the level of the organization, communication between organizations, and mass communication. Many authors divide levels into micro, mezzo, and macro. The micro-level corresponds to interpersonal communication, the mezzo level to group or organizational levels, and the macro-level to mass communication. Interpersonal and group communication are on a lower level than organizational communication, but they are the most important forms of communication within an organization. Communication at the organizational level is

centered on the mezzo level. This viewpoint implies a conflict between the mezzo and micro. With progress from the micro to the mezzo, we can introduce another level of differentiation, the formal-informal or vertical-horizontal level [18].

Even though it is widely known and needs not much description, IMO¹ considers the human element as a critical component of ship life safety and a contributing factor to the majority of maritime accidents. Observing the above-mentioned, maritime safety and navigation safety can be improved by focusing more on the human factor. Considering an organization in the maritime industry, whether that is a shipping company or a marina, it is necessary to have good communication between all staff or crew and managers to have clear instructions on tasks one must perform to fully succeed in task completion. If such is missing or is not completely clear, errors can and most likely will occur. According to Sánchez-Beaskoetxea et al. (2021), 75% of vessel accidents occur through human error, but only 45,83% are committed by a crew member on a vessel. Observing this data, the above stated could have been a certain miscommunication where one side has not properly conveyed a message or the other has not received it how it was meant to be received – creating an error instead of the completed task, but without having any information this remains nothing but a theory. Still, this can give a good idea of how proper communication and active listening have a major role in any aspect of message transmission. That is why it is important for managers to constantly improve communication and encourage others in their organization to do the same – the organization can be presented as successful with high-quality staff on the market [16].

Managers need to understand how the existence of inadequate internal and external communication leads to negative performance and poor results for the company, it is imperative to adopt and implement measures of adequate communication inside and outside the organization through confident behavior and acceptance of equal rights of both them and their interlocutors [13]. All managers must be in constant communication with other managers on the same hierarchical level as well as with senior and lower management, and employees. That is why proper communication is a must-have skill for a good (and successful) manager [6]. Internal communication extends through all segments within an organization and connects all hierarchical levels and communication processes, whereas external communication is the contact of managers and employees in the organization with suppliers, business partners, and the wider community. What is important for successful internal communication is reciprocity in the interlocutor. The very form of communication within the organization shows pre-agreed behaviors and the realization of the communication process in all interlocutors. Formal and informal communication are systems of the flow of various information, hints, and data. With too much informality in communication, there are no standardized rules of conduct and communication in the organization. External communication is most often done through

¹ International Maritime Organization (<https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/HumanElement/Pages/Default.aspx>).

advertising, but also through public relations, sponsorship, personal sales, and direct contact. It manages the image of the organization, i.e., communication with the external environment answers to how the organization is perceived and how successfully it is presented to the public. This expects the manager to have a professional approach when communicating, as well as with originality, innovation, and stronger attractiveness to competitors. Successful external communication is achieved by following trends, prompt and rapid reactions to market changes, acceptance of new technologies, faster flow of information, and so on [8].

Communication in crises

The goal of communication in business crises and situations is to establish trust, understanding, and harmonization of interests within the organization, but also between the organization and the external environment. During a crisis, it is important to have a professional approach to informing the management sphere within the organization, as well as employees, and, if the crisis is external, all other participants in the business. It is important that every crisis is understood as a developmental stage of the organization and that no situation is hopeless if it is noticed in time and approached to resolve. Under no circumstances should other organizations' crisis solutions be fully used because every organization is different, and thus every crisis is different and requires its personalized solution. To avoid (or reduce) the crisis itself, it is important to prepare well and develop a concrete model of communication during the crisis, both within the organization and with external associates and the public. It is also important to have a team that will actively monitor the state of the organization and respond to certain guidelines in times of crisis and find solutions to the problem [14].

Improving communication – productive communication

When everyone's perception of the struggle is communicated, conflict is sure to obtain. The verbal or nonverbal communication may be subtle such as a slight shift in body positioning or a hurried greeting, but it must be present for the activity to be classified as interpersonal conflict. As a result, other conditions must exist before an interaction can be labeled "conflict" [11]. Various obstacles and interruptions can often occur in the managerial communication process – perfect communication is almost unattainable and difficult to achieve. That is why it is important to implement the growth of communication skills in all segments of the communication process through the human resources management system – monitoring the success of communication. Improving good techniques of organizational behavior brings managers success in improving communication, with knowledge of communicating with people, encouraging communication, motivation, and various rewards [8]. All conflict analysis revolves around perception. People react in interpersonal conflicts as if they have genuinely opposed goals, some resource is scarce, and the other person is impeding something

valuable to the perceiver. These conditions are sometimes believed to be true but determining what is perceived and what is interpersonally accurate is the foundation of conflict analysis [11].

Conflict resolution is often a complex and complicated process. There is no pattern of conflict resolution precisely because the interlocutors do not perceive the cause of the conflict with equal intensity. The process of resolving a conflict involves acquainting the conflicting parties with an understanding of the situation that led to the conflict from the point of view of the other party. After that, the interlocutors need to discuss a constructive solution, one that is acceptable to both parties. It is important to analyze well the cause of the conflict and all the solutions offered, and then choose the one that suits both sides best. The most common form of conflict resolution is a compromise, and its essence is that each side must give up some part of their interest, which is in favor of the other side. A compromise can only be reached if neither side loses or jeopardizes their interests to a greater extent - it can only be applied if both sides are mature and mentally formed individuals operating at an appropriate civilized level [14].

It is important to master various communication processes that will help the manager to productively communicate. By asking questions during the interaction, the interlocutor is led to clarify the conversation or his thoughts. This informs the other interlocutor that he is actively being listened to. By reformulating the content, the meaning of the shared information is retained, and thus the interlocutor receives positive or negative feedback on the understanding of the transmitted information. By monitoring the emotional state of the interlocutors, it is seen that the intensity of the transmitted information is better understood along with the reasons for communication. The summary brings a conclusion and presents the basic items of communication. This clarifies the shared information; the interlocutor, once again, learns that he was actively and concentratedly listened to. In productive communication, it is important to control one's emotions, actively monitor the interlocutor, and react by following changes in the interlocutor's behavior. Practicing productive communication, i.e., working on oneself, improves social and communication skills and gains self-confidence (which is extremely important during public appearances) [9].

Although most people (in this case managers) believe that they know how to properly communicate, in essence, this is not the case. Analyzing one's conversation, talking about the conversation with oneself or with the interlocutor, often shows how many mistakes there are during communication, or how much needs to be corrected, changed, or improved. As a result, the use of metacommunication (a tool for discussing the conversation itself, how the message is conveyed, verbal and nonverbal speech, and so on) provides all the means for successful productive communication [4]. It is worth noting how relationship-building and productivity grow with contented and motivated employees who feel a sense of belonging and respect within the organization where they work – meaning managers must lead and not boss, creating a positive environment with high-quality work in contrary to a fear-implemented surrounding with low quality work [10].

Rather than waiting for a crisis to occur, it is necessary to review all interpersonal relationships with the potential to create a miscommunication in the business environment when everything is going well. To prevent crises in interpersonal communication, managers must exchange reviews of the relationship between employees, between managers themselves, discuss possible miscommunications with manager's supervisors, and so on, agree on what is going well and what isn't, and consider what matters most. A lot of conflict arises simply as a result of our assumptions about others and the interpretations we place on what they say. A few minutes of skillful and honest discussion could defuse such conflicts. If there are difficult people in the workplace, a manager may want to investigate and comprehend their motivations before condemning their actions [15].

Metacommunication

Metacommunication refers to the consideration of the very process of communication described by Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson in 1951² who defined metacommunication as communication about communication, meaning that communication can be used as the topic discussed among interlocutors. Ruesch and Bateson described metacommunication as a "new order" of communication that arose in the evolution of mammals and explained some distinctively complex, creative, and deeply paradoxical qualities of social interaction. Beyond the denotative level (the exact content of what is said), there are two more abstract levels: metalinguistic (messages about the language used) and metacommunicative (messages about how people communicate) [5]. When researching the metacommunication concept, the results (scientific papers, books, articles, etc.) showed usage of metacommunication to a certain extent in some research areas. According to Baltzersen (2013), there appears to be a growing interest in verbal metacommunication in research on social pretend play. When describing metacommunication in social pretend play it's important to note that such research is mainly observed in children's play and also needs to distinguish between explicit and implicit metacommunication. Explicit metacommunication is used to describe children who play the narrator rather than the character. Such "out-of-frame" strategies are typically verbal and are frequently used at the start of playing to establish roles and relationships (e.g., "I want to be Dad, and you can be Mom."). Implicit metacommunication, on the other hand, is used to describe children who remain in character while metacommunicating. Both verbal and nonverbal behaviour help to define the play frame in these situations, but it is not discussed explicitly. Because there are fewer disruptions in the play, this is considered more effective once the game has begun. When discussing metacommunication research in psychotherapy, it is primarily

² Ruesch and Bateson introduced metacommunication in their book *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (1951/1968).

used as a concept related to “talk about talk” – describing metacommunication as the verbal exploration of the unfolding relationship between the therapist and client. This is regarded as a critical component of interpersonal and relational psychotherapies [3].

Understanding that metacommunication can serve as a remedy for poor communication, where the keynote speaker explains to his interlocutors how they talk to each other (with the main request of moving away from conflict with a joint observation of the way they communicated) the situation is more clearly perceived and the conclusion about the internal agonies and quarrels of the interlocutors is more clearly reached. When one is encouraged to clarify the exact and honest subject of the conflict and the main driver of the conflict, very often the other side is encouraged to be sincere and willing to resolve the conflict. Metacommunication as a tool for talking about conversation can improve communication in various aspects of society, by adapting the conversation to the abilities of the interlocutor and encouraging metacommunication, i.e., communicating about how to communicate. Metacommunication as a tool needs to be practiced, mastered, and developed and only then one can learn how to communicate with their interlocutor(s) and how to encourage them to practice successful communication (with other interlocutors, and so on) [6].

Authors’ research results of metacommunication usage

The authors conducted pilot research in metacommunication usage in November 2021 among Croatian Maritime Management students of the Faculty of Maritime Studies in Split, Croatia, and their Erasmus colleagues predominately from Poland. The research aimed to demonstrate the participants’ general knowledge of metacommunication in terms of definition and application among themselves and with their professors. The authors’ concept was to envision how students, as potential future maritime managers, are introduced to productive communication through metacommunication among their university colleagues and professors by imagining a business environment in which colleagues are represented as students and supervisors are represented as professors. The research also sought to determine how research participants would handle communication in the future business environment. It was conducted *in vivo*, where a group of students (consisting of residential and Erasmus students) were given a printed questionnaire consisting of 16 questions in total.

The survey’s design has two sections – the first contains demographic data with one question where the participant needs to select what they believe is the correct definition of metacommunication with the second section containing two Likert scale tables: one with metacommunication usage in university surroundings and the other with personal statements regarding using metacommunication. At the beginning of the second section, the participants were shown the correct expanded definition of metacommunication which was used as guidance for answering the next set of questions. Table 1. shows the numbers of both participant groups as well as percentages of survey completion for each group.

Table 1: Number of participants and survey completion rate

<u>Research conducted among students of the Faculty of Maritime Studies in Split:</u>	
Croatian students of Faculty of Maritime Studies:	42
The number of Croatian students who participated in the survey:	26
Erasmus students at the Faculty of Maritime Studies in Split:	19
The number of Erasmus students who participated in the survey:	11
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS:	61
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS (PARTICIPATED):	37
<u>Survey completion rate:</u>	
Croatian students:	61,90%
Erasmus students:	57,89%
TOTAL:	60,66%

Source: Kraljević & Russo, Research conducted for metacommunication usage, University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, 2021

As shown in Table 1, and stated earlier, the survey was conducted among two groups – Croatian students of Maritime Management (2nd-year Graduate) and their Erasmus colleagues (1st-year Graduate) for the academic year 2021/2022.

The data showed more females than males completed the survey, without non-binary students or those who did not want to share their gender. In numbers, the percentage of Croatian males who completed the survey is 42,3% and 57,7% of females, whereas the percentage of Erasmus students is: for males 36,4% and females 63,3%. Since the continuing research results analysis shows both groups merged into one, Figure 1 shows the blended gender percentage of both groups.

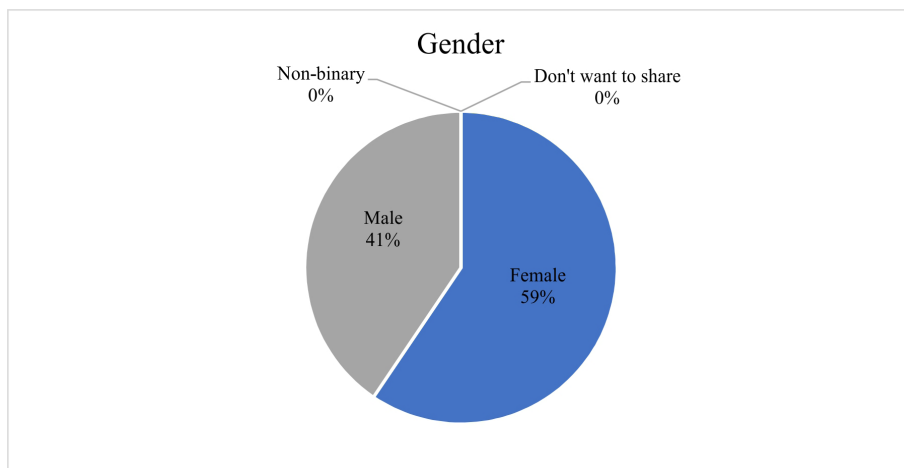


Figure 1: Gender percentage

Source: Kraljević & Russo, Research conducted for metacommunication usage, University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, 2021

Age groupings for both parties were majorly among 22 to 25 years of age for Croatian students (96,2%) whereas Erasmus students were divided between 18 to 21 (45,5%) and 22 to 25 (45,5%) years of age. Combined, this gives the data of 13,5% of those aged between 18-21, 81% of those aged between 22-25, and 2,7% of those aged between 26-29 and 30+ (as shown in Figure 2).

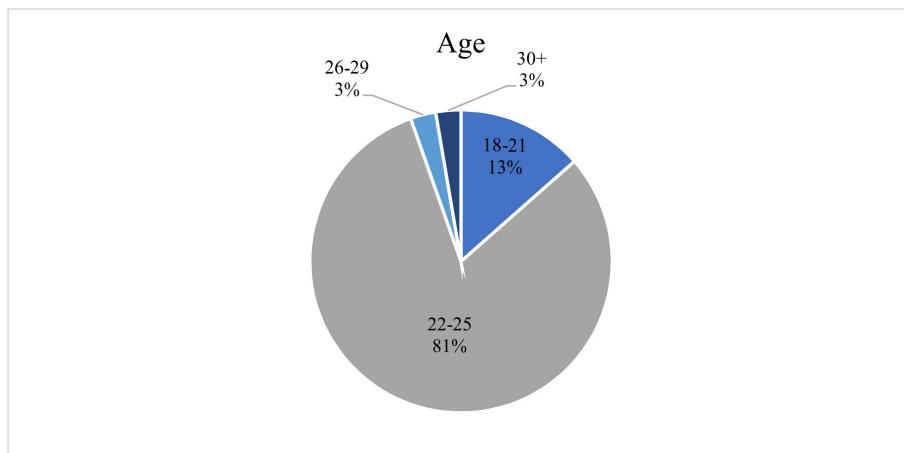


Figure 2: Age of participants

Source: Kraljević & Russo, Research conducted for metacommunication usage, University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, 2021

Observing these figures and calculating given demographic data, the majority of participants in the survey were females, aged between 22 and 25.

When the definition of metacommunication was discussed in the survey, the data from the research showed how in both groups the knowledge of metacommunication was above 70% (visible in Figure 3). The given answers for the definition of metacommunication were:

1. Talking about personal issues with a close friend/family member,
2. Communicating about communication – how we communicate (*correct*),
3. The transfer of information using body language,
4. Communication between managers and workers located in different functional divisions.

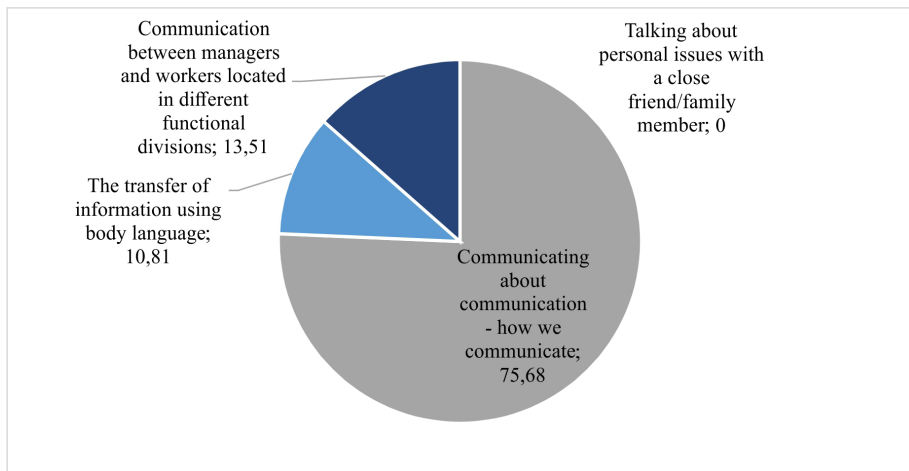


Figure 3: Knowledge of metacommunication - definition

Source: Kraljević & Russo, Research conducted for metacommunication usage, University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, 2021

Knowledge of the definition of metacommunication was found in 40.5% of female participants versus 32.4% of male participants. 35% of male participants and 48.5% of female participants said they considered themselves good communicators. When asked about metacommunication usage in their university surroundings (as seen in Figure 4), the participants majorly showed slight usage of metacommunication as a tool when communicating with their colleagues and professors. Figure 5 describes why metacommunication is not more widely and frequently used. Most participants haven't enough knowledge on the matter researched and/or are not confident enough with using metacommunication. The measurement in both figures was done using a Likert scale with 1 being the least and 5 being the most agreed on the matter.

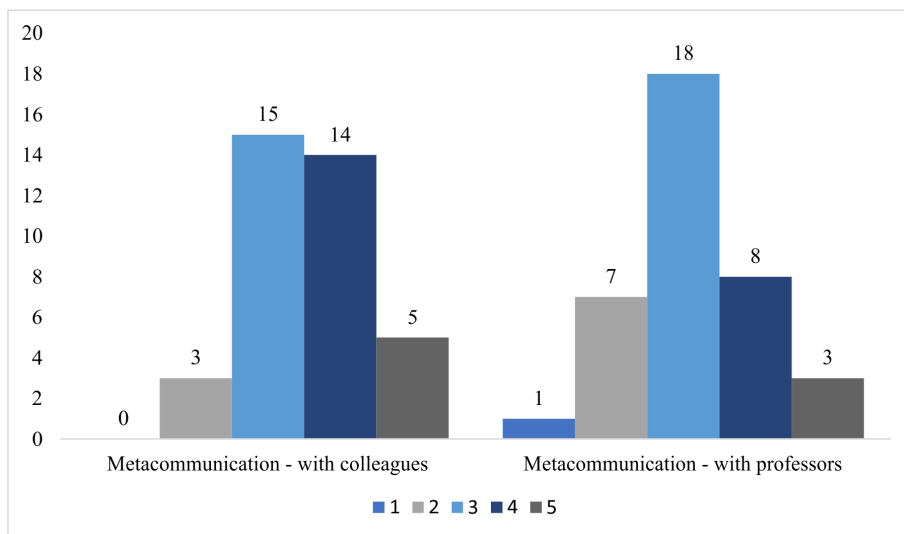


Figure 4: Using metacommunication in university surroundings

Source: Kraljević & Russo, Research conducted for metacommunication usage, University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, 2021

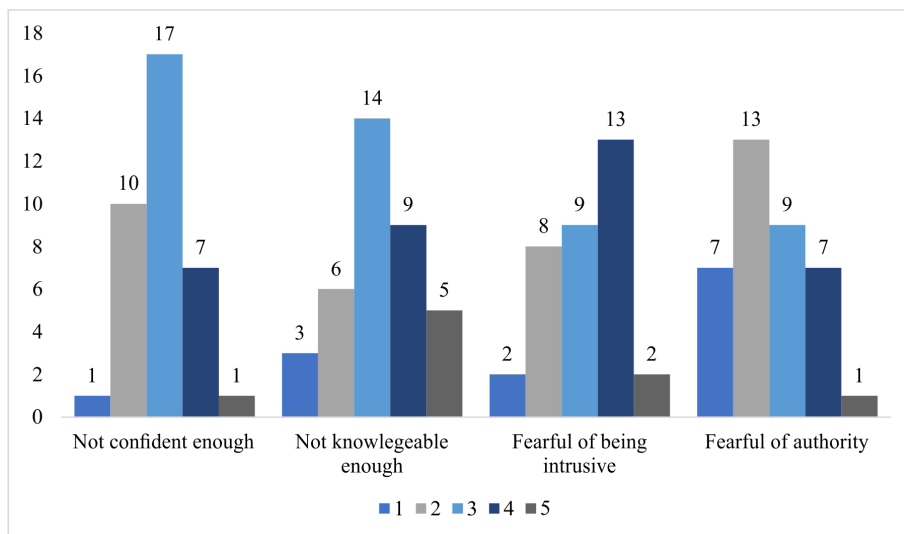


Figure 5: Reasons for not using metacommunication

Source: Kraljević & Russo, Research conducted for metacommunication usage, University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, 2021

When asked about attendance to a metacommunication course, the majority were not interested in participating in such courses, but of those who said they would attend, females (73%) showed more interest than males (40%).

Conclusion

Successful communication is the result of the professional and productive execution of all activities arising from the communication skills of managers. It is important, for effective communication, that all those involved in the direction of achieving organizational goals are responsible, and this is assessed using the expected results. Improving communication is made possible by human resource management, and adaptation to technical and electronic matters. A good manager is one who actively monitors the situation in the organization, reacts on time, and informs all the participants in the communication process who are important to be aware of the problems or improvements of the organization. Within the organization, it is necessary to encourage and motivate communication, because it provides all the necessary information about the situation among the activities that can worsen or improve the competitiveness of the organization itself, especially in crises. Managers are also expected to be in constant communication with everyone, from their superiors to their subordinates as well as with all external associates. It is necessary to continuously improve communication skills through various education, seminars, training, courses, etc. Knowledge of communication with people ensures the achievement of greater efficiency and effectiveness among all employees. Given that communication is ubiquitous in all spheres of life, not just in one organization, it is important and expected that communication actors work on their skills and behave maturely in case of conflict and disagreement. Working on employee-manager relationships (employee-to-employee and manager-to-manager), pre-crisis communication work, and metacommunication for better interpersonal employment results in satisfied and motivated employees who feel a sense of belonging to the organization.

Observing research results among students, it is clear how metacommunication is a field not implemented enough to be recognized and used for better communication and is a matter that needs more attention. One can then assume that if students do not learn how to improve their communication skills during their studies, they cannot be expected to be skilled enough and communicate well in their future work environment. And with that in mind, it is necessary to think about the current situation in organizations (as far as management is concerned) in quality mutual business communication, the level it is currently at, and does it need improvement.

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