

Teach to reach! Content Unit 2

















Table of Contents

2	Pola	risation in communication	2
	2.1	Introduction (building knowledge) - 10min	2
	2.2	You and I - Icebergs in the Water (Building Knowledge) - 25min	2
	2.3	When Icebergs collide (Apply Knowledge) - 50min	3
	2.4	My private and my public self (building knowledge) - 15min	5
	2.5	Me - public and private (apply knowledge) - 50min	5
	2.6	The News Square (Building Knowledge) - 50min	6
	2.7	4 Ears, 4 Beaks (Apply Knowledge) - 50min	8
	2.8	News Square and Polarisation (Apply Knowledge) - 75min	<u>S</u>
	2.9	Body language (building knowledge) - 50 min	10
	2.10	Communication channels and polarisation (apply knowledge) - 50min	12
	2.11	Group Dynamics (building knowledge) - 30min	13
	2.12	Group Dynamics and Polarisation (Apply Knowledge) - 70min	14
	2.13	Non-violent communication (building knowledge) - 50min	15
	2.14	Nonviolent Communication (Securing Knowledge) - 25min	17
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2 Polarisation in communication

2.1 Introduction (building knowledge) - 10min

What does "polarisation" mean?

Our world is a diverse place. People have different ideas, needs and desires, they pursue different goals and see meaning in different things. They have changing ideas of good and evil, they have not all had the same upbringing and education, they have not grown up in the same circumstances and have had very diverse experiences in their lives.

This diversity can be a significant enrichment if we learn to deal with it. This is an excellent mission, especially in a rapidly changing world that is becoming ever closer through modern technologies. However, if we do not learn to do this, different life models can also lead to multiple conflicts and disputes. The emergence of these conflicts is called *polarisation*. This means that rigid *poles* develop among people, which, just like the north and south poles of the earth, are far away from each other and can even be opposite to each other. Polarisation can occur wherever different ideas, habits, circumstances, attitudes or expectations clash and are not mediated with each other. If, on top of that, polarisation between people remains unaddressed, many difficulties can develop: Ignorance, exclusion, arguments or even violence.

Recognising, addressing, and overcoming polarisation is therefore part of shaping a peaceful, communal and respectful world in which all people can find their home, on both a small and a large scale.

What is "polarisation in communication"?

Polarisation occurs in many ways in our forms of communication. Be it in interpersonal conversations, in exchanges via digital media, in group dynamics or in body language. Especially when communicating, many aspects influence us quite unconsciously and generate certain feelings, impressions or opinions that can lead to mutual polarisation. It is therefore important to be able to reflect on the level of communication in order to be able to recognise, address and overcome the polarisations that arise at an early stage.

2.2 You and I - Icebergs in the Water (Building Knowledge) - 25min

Look at the following two pictures of icebergs. You have probably had the experience in your life that you have misjudged people, perhaps met them with prejudice or they met you in a completely different way than you would have expected. This is because we carry two levels within us, only one of which is visible. Therefore, we can quickly misjudge others and be misjudged by them.







The so-called *iceberg model* is a simple model that tries to represent these two levels. It assumes that every human being is like an iceberg floating on the ocean.

Practical Relevance

Now form pairs or small groups. Work out answers to the following questions together:

- What examples can you find of the different areas on the iceberg?
- In your opinion, what role does the iceberg part above the water surface play for people and what role does the part below the water surface play? Give reasons for your position.

Then compare your results together in class.

2.3 When Icebergs collide (Apply Knowledge) - 50min

The iceberg model of communication points out that we only ever notice a small part of a person immediately when we meet. The largest part lies under the surface of the water. At the same time, however, it represents the far larger part of what makes a person. If we do not pay attention to this, it can lead to prejudices, misjudgements, misunderstandings and ultimately to polarisation between people.

Important

The visible part of the iceberg is also called the part of me that I show *explicitly*. The invisible part is called *implicit* (i.e. *non-explicit*). The implicit part is therefore not equally visible. But that does not mean that it is not there or has no influence on us.



Practical Relevance

Discuss in class how the fact that we all have an *explicit* (visible) and an *implicit* (invisible) part about us could lead to polarisation as soon as people meet. How can this fact lead to misunderstandings, misconceptions, prejudices or even conflicts between people?

Think of at least three concrete situations per person and share them with the class.

Now let us also turn to possible solutions to this problem.

Practical Relevance

Imagine the following: You are standing on the visible part of your iceberg and looking down through the water's surface. First answer the following questions for yourself:

- Which of the above areas do you see below the water surface?
- Which of the areas have you already dealt with more closely and which hardly or not at all? --
- What can you say about them?
- What conclusions can you draw about your knowledge of yourself? Do you have the feeling that you already know and understand your visible and invisible iceberg parts well?

Then discuss your thoughts in class.

After the discussion, we imagine a second iceberg drifting in on the ocean: another person meets us. He too tries to get a glimpse of himself through the water's surface.

Now let us also turn to possible solutions to this problem.

Practical Relevance

Your two icebergs drift closer and closer to each other. You come within shouting distance, maybe even close enough to throw each other a rope. In other words, you begin to communicate with each other.

- How can you get to know each other's iceberg better?
- What should you consider when communicating?
- What effects could it have if you better understand both your own iceberg and the other person's?

Discuss these questions together in class. At the end, try to work out how communication between the two icebergs could look like in order to avoid polarisation from the beginning?



Practical Relevance

The iceberg model is of course only a metaphor. In the discussion, apply it to polarising situations you have encountered in everyday life and ask yourself how you could have communicated to avoid polarisation and strengthen cohesion.

2.4 My private and my public self (building knowledge) - 15min

The iceberg communication model shows us that every human combines visible and invisible levels. Therefore, we can never assume that what we see in a person is all there is to them. Most of it is invisible and influences us in many ways.

If we reduce a person only to the visible or directly recognisable part, we neglect large parts of their personality. This can lead to polarisation between people via several intermediate steps, creating misunderstandings, misperceptions or prejudices.

But we can learn even more from the iceberg model. We distinguish between two central dimensions of our communication, both of which play very different roles for us:

- a) the private dimension
- b) the public dimension

The Public is everything that we can explicitly (expressly) determine, perceive, or observe about each other. Or vice versa: the public is everything I show others or reveal about myself.

Private is everything that we cannot directly or only implicitly determine, perceive or observe about each other. Or vice versa: private is everything I do not directly show or reveal about myself to others.

Practical Relevance

Each person makes two lists, one next to the other. Which topics would you personally consider to be *public*, and which would you consider to be *private*?

2.5 Me - public and private (apply knowledge) - 50min

Now grab your mobile phone or pen and paper, depending on what is available or what you prefer to work with. Then retire to a quiet place, preferably with no one around. Then devote yourself to the following task:

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Practical Relevance

Tell yourself about your last week or day of school. Prepare two narratives:

- a) Tell about the week or day from the perspective of your public dimension. What did you show to others? How and about what did you communicate with them? Which events did you highlight in particular?
- b) Tell the week or day from the perspective of your private dimension. What did you not show to others? How did you feel and what thoughts did you keep to yourself? What would you have liked to communicate but didn't dare to?

Each of the two narratives can be made in the form of an audio or video recording (min. 3 minutes per recording) or written down as text (min. three-quarters of a page).

In the next step, compare the two recordings or texts and highlight for the similarities and differences between the private and public dimensions.

Then you come back together in the class. Now everyone can report on their observations. Note: no one has to give details of their recordings or texts, but everyone can. It is rather important that you tell in general what observations you have made about the similarities and differences between your two narratives.

And now to the subject of polarisation.

Practical Relevance

As a class, identify the differences between public and private communication. In which communities, online and offline, do they come into play, apart from school (e.g., family, circles of friends, Facebook groups, ...). Then ask yourselves together how this could lead to polarisation because I reveal certain information about myself and hide others?

Then consider how to prevent or reduce polarisation given that communication always has a private and a public dimension that do not match. Record your findings together. (Imagine a situation where one of your classmates is in a bad mood or even aggressive all day because of a stressful incident in the family. Conflicts arise between you - how could these conflicts be avoided by dealing more sensibly with private and public dimensions of communication without forcing the pupil to tell everything privately?)

2.6 The News Square (Building Knowledge) - 50min

Did you know that you can communicate in many more ways than just public or private? Over time, communication becomes very complicated. We often don't know with which ear we should listen or with which goal we are communicating something. That's why Friedemann Schulz von Thun wondered whether this complex tangle could be made more explicit.

The result is called: news square.

To understand this model, let us briefly look at an example:





imagine that you are the passenger in this car. You are at a red light and are not allowed to drive. Meanwhile, you are talking animatedly and the traffic light turns green. You see this first and say, "It's green."

Practical Relevance

In class, try out different ways of saying the sentence "It's green" in this situation. Emphasise it in different ways, put different moods and feelings into it, say it slower, faster, with pauses and whatever else you can think of.

Gather your impressions of how many different statements you can put in the same sentence and think about how the driver of the car you are sitting in might react to them all.

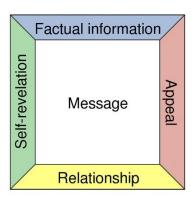
If you have the time, you can also act out some of these situations in short episodes in pairs and have others interpret them.

The message square attempts to bring these different forms of communication into a simple and easily understandable model. With this model, many of our communication processes can be interpreted and understood. For polarisation, this is particularly important in that we can better understand how misunderstandings and misconceptions can occur that may eventually lead to conflict.

The basic model of the news square looks like this:









Receiver

Figure 1: four-sides model
Source: https://4eyes-model.com/

So you have four beaks if you are a transmitter and four ears if you are a receiver.

Practical Relevance

Now, in teams of two, try to interpret this graph and write down as many thoughts as possible. Ask yourselves the following questions: How are the individual colours connected? What could the individual parts of the square mean in communication?

If you don't know certain terms in the chart, you can also research them.

In the second step, apply your interpretations to the situation in the car with "It's green. Remember the many different ways of saying and meaning the same sentence again. Now try to interpret them together with the message square.

If you get stuck, discuss the issue in class. When you have finished, compare your results.

2.7 4 Ears, 4 Beaks (Apply Knowledge) - 50min

The message square comprises four central perspectives that take place between senders and receivers. So we send with four beaks and receive with four ears. These four perspectives contained in each message are called:

- a) Factual perspective: The factual perspective means that informative factual content is continually exchanged between the communicators. In the case of the statement "It is green." in front of a traffic light, this means that the traffic light is green. This information can be sent with the beak and received with the ear.
- b) Relationship perspective: Every communication reflects a relationship between sender and receiver. Perhaps the statement "It's green." expresses the relationship that a driving



instructor tells a learner driver to drive off now - it is therefore a teaching relationship. Or there may be an argument going on between the two people in the vehicle and the sentence "It's green." is meant to end it because it interrupts the conflict, or spur it on further because it has a lecturing effect.

- c) Appeal perspective: An appeal is a request. Our communication always includes a request that something be done or not done. This is often not so clear. The statement "It's green." can, depending on the situation and the relationship, mean, for example, "Drive off!" or "Concentrate!". Whether an appeal and which appeal is received depends especially on the recipient. But of course the way a message is sent is also crucial.
- d) Self-revelation perspective: Finally, every communication involves a so-called self-revelation. This means that we always show (= reveal) something of ourselves when we communicate. This can also take place in a very hidden or incomprehensible way, but it is always there and one can interpret every communication in terms of the self-revelation it contains. In our example "It's green." the self-revelation could be, for example, that the sender wants to indicate "I'm in a hurry." or "I think I have to help you." The self-revelation depends centrally on the person sending, but is influenced by the receiver's behaviour.

The message square teaches us that senders and receivers are always in a highly complex relationship with each other. This relationship does not always show itself in the same way, but one can use the message square to work out the four sides of a message.

Practical Relevance

Acting time! Now form pairs or small groups. Develop individual short communication scenes in which all four perspectives of a message occur and then act out these scenes in the class. The others have to work out the four perspectives. (If you don't feel comfortable in the acting role, you can also write down the communication scenes and read them out to the class).

Then discuss your findings and what you have found about the complex relationship between sender and receiver. Write it down together.

2.8 News Square and Polarisation (Apply Knowledge) - 75min

Much of the polarisation starts with misunderstood or deliberately damaged communication. That is why it is always important to monitor how we communicate. The message square can help us both recognise polarisation and reduce it when it is already happening.

Above all, the news square teaches us how easily misunderstandings can lead to conflict and to real polarisation if they are repeatedly left unsaid. If uttered once, the sentence "It's green" can lead to a brief misunderstanding or, at most, to a brief argument. However, if such communication situations occur repeatedly and people are already tense towards each other, minor conflicts will eventually turn into polarities that are difficult to reduce.

Practical Relevance

First discuss the following question with the person sitting next to you and record your results: how can the individual parts of the news square help us to recognise and prevent polarisation at an early stage? Then briefly discuss your findings in class.

Perhaps you have realised that the news square is a particularly good way of understanding that polarisation can develop when different beaks and ears meet.

For example: "You really know the answer to everything". - This statement can be meant as a factual statement about a person who knows a lot. However, if it is not heard with the factual ear but with the appeal ear, then an invitation can be heard behind it. If it is perhaps understood as a self-revelation, the person uttering it may want to say something more about himself than about the recipient.

Practical Relevance

Take the example "You really know the answer to everything". And combine the different ears and beaks. Ask yourself how this could lead to misunderstandings and even conflict and polarisation between people. Do this alone first and then discuss it in class.

It is not always easy to assess such misunderstandings between beaks and ears from the outset or to be able to reduce them afterwards.

Practical Relevance

Now go together in pairs or groups and write or tell the story of two people who, through constant miscommunication, first come into conflict, then into ongoing conflict and finally into polarity with each other.

Present this story to your class (you can tell it or even act it out) and then think about how this polarisation could have been prevented at the beginning or at least reduced afterwards by using the news square for analysis.

2.9 Body language (building knowledge) - 50 min

Communication does not only take place through language. In interpersonal encounters, it is also a matter of movements, gestures, facial expressions or tone of voice. All of this can be referred to in one term under the title "body language" or more generally as "non-verbal communication".

Important

Body language is a central factor in human communication. If we do not have it available, essential content disappears. Just ask yourself whether it makes a difference to end a love relationship in physical presence and face to face or only via chat message that has neither tone of voice nor a body.

Practical Relevance

In two minutes ask yourself in which ways and situations body language has played or could play an essential role in your life. Then compare in class.

Now a little theory! We distinguish three different types of gestures in our body language. Of course, not every body language communication fits exactly into these three categories, but they provide a good foil for an approach. We distinguish:

- a) Illustrators: Illustrators are gestures we use to support what we say verbally. For example, many people talk "with their hands", others are more reserved with their bodies. Always try to find out to what extent someone uses their body when communicating. Not everyone does it in the same way.
- b) Regulators: Regulators are gestures that do not have to be accompanied by verbal communication. They serve to frame or regulate the communication situation or to indicate boundaries. This can be, for example, raising a hand to calm the situation or spontaneously looking down to express embarrassment.
- c) Emblems: Emblems are gestures that have a fixed meaning and communicate a fixed content. However, these gestures can take on different meanings depending on culture, region or context and do not have to express the same thing everywhere or in every situation. For example, in this world there are areas where a nod of the head is the emblem for "yes", while in other areas it is the emblem for "no".

Practical Relevance

Now try to communicate with a partner using only regulators and emblems and analyse: what is good to communicate and what is not? Then add verbal language and illustrators and observe how your communication changes. Then talk about it in class.

You have certainly noticed that only certain contents can be communicated well with the body alone. But now imagine that you leave the body out of communication altogether. Think of phone calls, text messages, comments on the internet and so on. You could discuss this in class.

2.10 Communication channels and polarisation (apply knowledge) - 50min



Now remember the story of Romeo and Juliet. If you don't know it, ask your teacher to tell you. Then imagine the following: Romeo and Juliet did not die in the end, but survived and started a relationship. After a few years, however, they discover that they are not as good together as they originally thought. So they want to separate from each other.

Practical Relevance

Now take on the role of Romeo or Juliet. You want to end the relationship. Think about different media where this can happen and act out the break-up. Here are some possibilities:

- a dialogue
- a letter
- a chat
- a video message
- a phone call
- through a good friend
- ..

Afterwards, compare your results and discuss how the other person might react to the breakup (e.g. in a dialogue or in a chat message). Examine together how the choice of medium affects communication. After all, it makes a difference whether you end a relationship via chat message or in a more extended face-to-face conversation. Lack of body language, for example, also plays a central role. Ask yourselves why this is so.

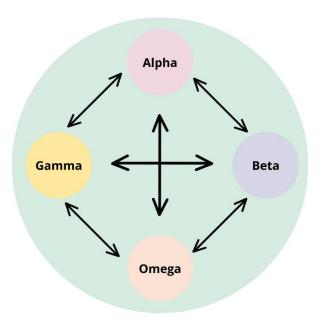
After you have collected your results and compared the different media, we go back to the topic of polarisation.

Practical Relevance

Now discuss in class how the choice of medium can affect polarisation. How and in which situations can a poorly chosen medium (e.g. a text message instead of a face-to-face conversation) lead to misunderstandings, conflicts and even polarities between people. Collect examples in class and then discuss how they might be reduced by choosing a different medium. Apply your reflections to the results of Romeo and Juliet.

2.11 Group Dynamics (building knowledge) - 30min

People hardly ever live their lives alone. Of course, we always have to deal with others. You can therefore also say: people always appear in groups. That is why psychology has long looked at how



such groups function and what laws they follow. Austrian psychologist Raoul Schindler established one of the most famous models.

You may have heard of this scheme of group roles. To understand it properly, some aspects are crucial:

- a) Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Omega are *roles*. This means that any person in a group can take on any of these roles. They are not fixed.
- b) On the contrary, the roles are even constantly reassigned in the group.
- c) No matter how many people belong to a group, one person or several people can take on each role.

According to Schindler, a well-functioning group integrates all these roles. This means that it is not a matter of identifying *enemies* or *oppressive possibilities*, but of dealing sensibly with the existence of each role.

With this prior knowledge, we can now go on to explain the individual roles and their function for a well-functioning group dynamic:

The Alpha Role



Whoever takes the alpha position in a group causes the group to come into being in the first place. Alphas set initiatives through their actions and overall set the group identity and the goal. However, they do not necessarily do this through a discussion or argumentation process, but primarily simply through their actions. This means that alpha positions are taken through actions. Alphas are therefore not necessarily the loudest or most central group members. They are the ones who create the direction and structure of the group through their actions.

The Beta Role

The beta position in a group is occupied by those people who, during the alphas' predefinition, are primarily concerned with stabilisation and the functioning of the group. They discuss, argue, justify and reflect, criticise and refute - in short, they also check the quality of the alphas' actions. Therefore, it can happen that betas also become alphas or make a claim to this position. Therefore, beta positions are taken through *argumentation*, to stabilise the group.

The Gamma Role

People who take on the gamma role in a group primarily serve the assertiveness of the group dynamic. They are the ones who orient their own actions to the alphas and thus contribute to the function of the group in that, through their orientation to the alpha, everything does not have to be constantly renegotiated and agreed upon anew. Gamma positions in a group are thus taken through *succession* or *imitation in* relation to the alphas. Although gammas are often followers, they also have the important task of making the group capable of acting as a group in the first place.

The Omega Role

Omegas form something like the opposite position to the alphas. This does not mean that they are enemies of the group. The omega role is a role that is as important for the functioning of groups as the other roles. Because omegas are the ones who make alternatives, creative designs or other suggestions about how the group should behave in general. They are therefore those who claim the alpha role themselves but are not currently in the alpha role. The omega role is taken up by *resistance*, which has an equally central function for group dynamics.

Practical Relevance

In class, find examples of life situations in which these role distributions are recognisable and reflect on their significance for the group in question. In the process, think about initial ideas on how a poorly functioning group dynamic can ultimately lead to polarisation. Collect your ideas.

2.12 Group Dynamics and Polarisation (Apply Knowledge) - 70min

You now have the basic tools to recognise the dynamics of role distribution in groups and apply them to different groups. Now it's your turn.

Practical Relevance

Form groups of at least four people and then rehearse two short, self-discovered situations. One of the two situations should show how the group can solve a problem well by integrating all four roles appropriately, the other situation should show how a problem solution fails by not integrating one or more of the four roles well (usually it is the Omegas that are not integrated but fought against).

Then demonstrate your situations in class and let the others interpret what went wrong using the Schindler dynamics. Collect your results.

Then make a list of the reasons and causes why a failing group dynamic could lead to polarisation among people. Here are two examples:

- a) The Omegas are expelled from the Alphas for counter-proposals and declared enemies of the group.
- b) The Betas discuss different proposals in the group so endlessly that no decisions or actions are taken. In the end, everyone is dissatisfied with this.

What other reasons can you think of that could ultimately lead directly to polarisation, i.e. to the consolidation of opposition, via conflicts within the group?

2.13 Non-violent communication (building knowledge) - 50min

We all know that words or gestures can sometimes inflict more significant injuries than a slap in the face. That is why it is essential to understand how violence in communication arises and what can be done against it. Because to counteract the gradual polarisation in communication processes as a whole, it is important to know the basics of *non-violent communication*.

Before we come to this, a small task.

Practical Relevance

When communication becomes violent, insults, insinuations, accusations, generalisations, lies, manipulations, suppressions and so on occur. We also say: communication escalates, i.e. it crosses boundaries.

This escalation does not happen all at once, but proceeds in stages. That is why we speak of the escalation stages of violent communication.

Form pairs and write down your ideas for the following tasks:

- Find at least 3 different communication situations in which escalation occurs for different reasons.
- Ask yourselves how, in your examples, over different stages, this escalation can lead to polarisation among the participants, i.e. to the point where they see and treat each other as enemies
- Consider at which points one should have communicated differently to prevent the escalation.

Present some of your ideas to the class.

The psychologist Marshall Rosenberg developed one of the most influential models of non-violent communication. According to Rosenberg, escalation occurs primarily when:

- a) We do not communicate our needs clearly and understandably in a situation, e.g. if we assume that other people always know what we need at the moment.
- b) Mixing "observation" and "evaluation" in our communication behaviour, e.g. if an observed behaviour bothers us, but we immediately operate with accusations.
- c) We mix our feelings with our interpretations of the situation,
 e.g. when we are frustrated and express this in such a way that we immediately blame other people's behaviour for our feelings.
- d) We express our needs with threats of punishment, e.g. in sentences like: if you don't do this or that, I won't talk to you any more.

Rosenberg, therefore, recommends that we keep these mixtures apart and thus contribute to *non-violence* in communication:

- a) Observation should be communicated as an observation with a "I" message instead of a "you" message,
 - e.g. "I have the impression that..."; "I notice that...".
- b) Needs should be clearly communicated, e.g. "I need ..."; "I would prefer ...".
- c) Interpretation of the other person's behaviour should be avoided for the time being and instead one's own feelings should be communicated,
 - e.g. "I feel ..."; "I don't feel well with this"; "I can't right now".
- d) Requests should be expressed as pleas and invitations to compromise, not as veiled threats, e.g. "Let's try it this way..."; "I need your consideration right now...".



Practical Relevance

Now turn again to the situations of escalation you invented earlier. Then process them with Rosenberg's recommendations and think about how you could use the four methods of non-violent communication in a meaningful way. Then present your results to the class and discuss different situations together.

2.14 Nonviolent Communication (Securing Knowledge) - 25min

You have now become acquainted with some central aspects of how polarisation and division among people can occur in communication.

Practical Relevance

Finally, pair up and imagine the following: you want to develop a workshop for a group of people to help them improve their communication behaviour and prevent polarisation. Create a sketch for this workshop:

- How long does it last?
- What steps and exercises does it include and why?
- What exactly is your goal and how do you want to achieve it?

Collect your sketches in class so that you can refer to them later.

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