

# The theory of relational needs

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There are needs that are activated by the fact that people are involved in a relationship and disappear when people leave the relationship.. If they are satisfied, it will be less expensive to obtain the output(in terms of time, money, adrenaline, etc.): IT IS AN EFFICIENCY TOOL.


They appear to erase the Maslowian needs, at least temporarily. Their existence can explain and justify many work dynamics and apparently non explicable behaviours

## Characteristics of relational needs


Their axiomatic definition implies that:

1. They are **Universal**, shared with the same intensity by everybody, despite one's position in the world, census, wealth, fame, success etc.
2. They are **Continuos**: when satisfied, they appear once again as if they had never been satisfied.
3. They are **Progressive**: if not satisfied, they become more intensive, until they reach such a level that you are forced to satisfy them. In this case, in Bateson's theory the Relationship layer overwhelms the Content layer.

### Three relational needs

To be listened to  Existing

To receive feedback  Doing

To participate  Belonging

*First need: to be listened*

### Characteristics:

- Every speaker, whenever facing an audience, needs to be listened to
- The need to be listened to is independent of the content of your message
- Some messages are emitted only with the purpose of being listened to
- If this need is not satisfied, the sender will emit a louder message in order to arrive at such a level in volume or semantics that you cannot ignore it any longer

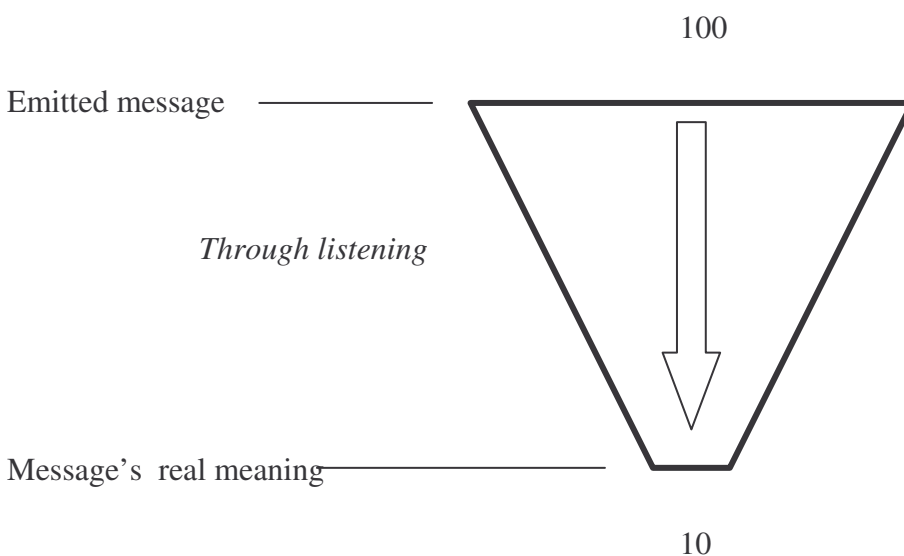
### Modern culture tends to believe **SOME MYTHS** with regards to listening:

- Listening implies agreement and compliance with the person who's speaking
- Listening weakens personal power and image, while talking enhances them
- The more hierarchical power you have, the more you are supposed to talk
- To motivate people you have to speak properly, both through the words you select and the emphasis you put into them (good speaking has more motivating value than good listening).

*Listening is therefore not only a way to receive information, it is mainly a way to satisfy a basic human need*

### The 100-10 effect

Sometimes people exaggerate the tone and the content of their communication, just as a way to be surer they will be listened to (catastrophic language). After listening, the real problem will appear less dramatic than before.



A complaint is first managed by listening, then by trying to solve the problem

In a «foreign» culture listening is the first tribute to pay to the other person; it relieves the anxiety and the stress caused by the unusual situation.

***Second relational need: feedback***

**Feedback is a reaction to what one says or does.**

Feedback could be positive, as a reaction to «good» behaviour, or negative.

The opposite of any feedback, whether positive or negative, is indifference.

**Indifference is an unbearable condition, in any culture.**

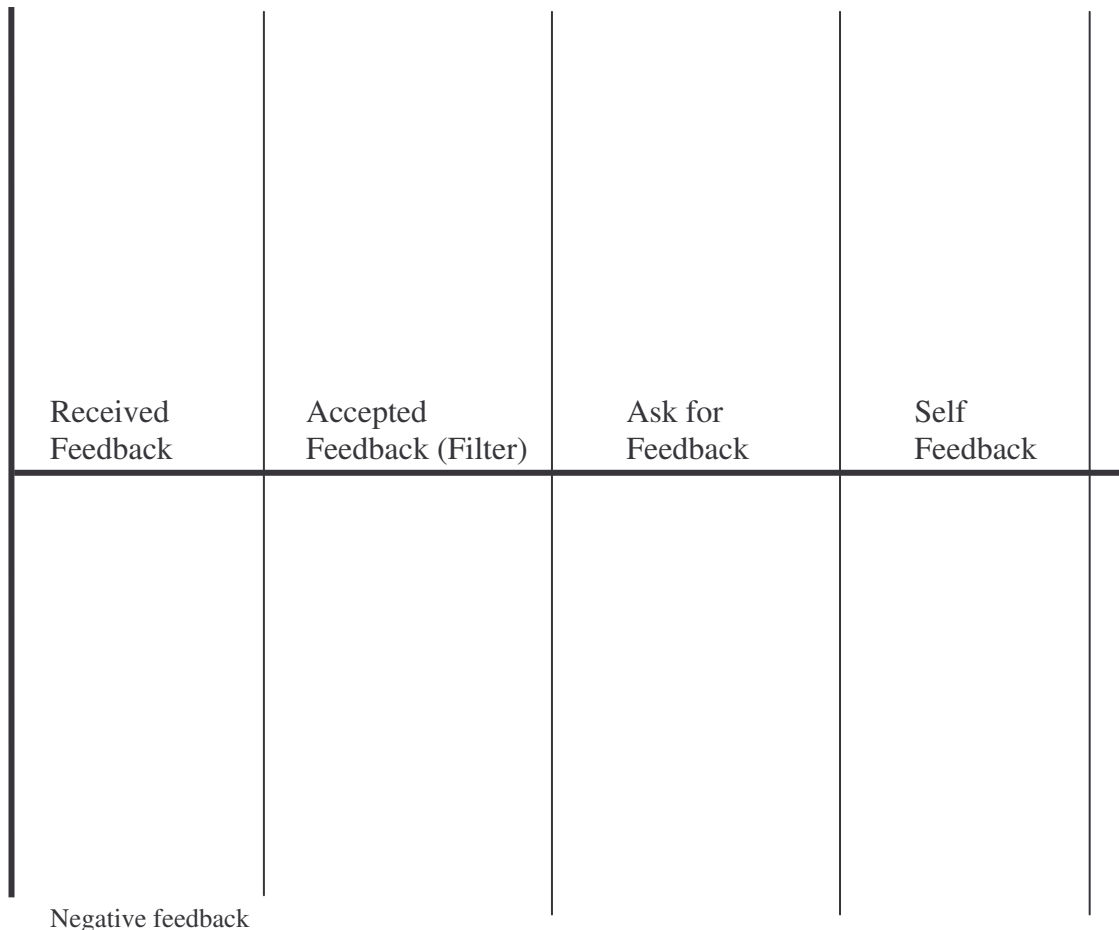
For this reason, people sometimes enhance feedback through negative behaviour (delays, mistakes, damages, imperfections, personal attacks, or similar ways...). This is congruent with the postulate of progressiveness.

Sensitivity to feedback depends on the group culture. Every group of people, whether at work or in a family, has a specific «**feedback economy**», which is influenced by the national culture.

It is possible to evaluate the **feedback economy** of a group and to depict a diagram to represent it.

*McKenna diagram for feedback economy*

Positive feedback



***Third relational need: participation***

In a human transaction there is a need to play a part, whatever that part is. Every person in that transaction needs his «counterpart» to leave some «empty space» in order to be able to occupy it with his communication or actions.

Some considerations and consequences on **participation**:

- It is important for a person to belong to a group, no matter what the characteristics or the mission of the group are.
- Having a part (even a minor part) is essential so that one can say "I am a member of this group" or «I feel respected in this relationship»
- Motivation and involvement are reached by a person through a role he/she finds within the transaction or the group he is physically in.
- *Involvement is NOT achieved through an enthusiastic, emphatic, touching speech or promise but by playing a role.*
- *Everybody, since childhood, struggles to have a role . In some cases a "bad role" is better than*

not playing role at all, as it frequently happens in classrooms (the disturber) or in work activities (the sabotaging or hostile person).

### **What participation can give**

- Involvement and commitment even by negatively oriented people, once they find their role.
- A protective and defensive attitude: the work, the group, the product, the decisions made, the objective of the transaction, the vision the group has of itself
- Group stability and resistance when severe external problems threaten it.
- Better work quality (not to be taken for granted, it is a facilitating factor).

### **Risks of a too intense participation**

It weakens the sense of reality and objective judgement of its own ideas and activities (difficult self-feedback)

It could create some group syndromes (Janis' theory)

isolation  
omnipotence  
invincibility

that can make it more difficult for the group to accept «the aliens».

In a few words, with participation the emphasis is now strongly on the Relationship level of Bateson's theory.

### **Impact of relational needs on a multicultural environment**

Assuming that everybody has these three needs, independently from the content of one's Black Box, the person working in a multicultural should satisfy them with particular care. This creates a sense of gratefulness, and the sense of satisfaction caused by relational needs tends to be reciprocated.

Then the «visitor» can count on a better level of listening if he himself is the first to pay attention; he can receive feedback which will be useful for him to proceed safely, and which can be more acceptable if he previously offered **room for participation** to the other person. The non-satisfaction of these needs, on the contrary, could cause a barrier to accomplishing transactions, also when these transactions are per se easy and interesting.

In a few words, the satisfaction of other people's relational needs is a lubricant to achieve higher and faster results in terms of Content (refer to Bateson's theory, where Content is the result you are aiming at)

They are preliminary conditions to make possible every simple communication among different cultures.

From experience it seems that the satisfaction of these needs can compensate for some negative factors, like a lower level of compensation, highly demanding tasks, a severe or uncomfortable environment.

These three needs and the nature of their melange represent the so-called «human climate» in an organisation.

Besides, a «multinational worker» had better pay attention to his own satisfaction of these needs, as they relieve the stress cause by expatriation.