

co·wonders



help? hear? hug?

help? hear? hug?

Written by: **Agata Stajer (Co.Wonders)**

What is it about:

- three mindsets of communication (decision making, social and emotional)
- how synchronising the communicators mindset can boost communication

source: Matching principle by Charles Duhigg

domains: supercommunicators, conversational mindsets, neurological synchronisation in conversations

approach description:

Charles Duhigg in his book “Supercommunicators” argues that to become a supercommunicator, all we need to do is to listen closely to what is said and unsaid, ask the right questions, recognize and match other’s moods, and make our own feelings for others to perceive. As each of those tasks is difficult on its own, a good starting point would be to learn recognizing in which kind of conversation we are actually participating.

Ch. Duhigg writes there are three kinds of conversation that dominate most discussions:

- **practical** (decision making) connected to “What’s this really about?”
- **emotional** connected to “How do we feel?”
- **social** connected to “Who are we?”.

When we want to discuss practicalities and our interlocutor wants to share feelings, we are unlikely to connect. According to the matching principle: “effective communication requires recognizing what kind of conversation is occurring, and then matching each other”. Thus we need to learn how to recognize the occurring conversation type, so that we can act as supercommunicators.

Practical (decision-making) conversation

It is associated with the “What’s this really about?” conversation, and happens whenever we are thinking about practical matters, such as making choices or analyzing plans. When someone says, “What are we going to do about Friday dinner?,” the part of our brain (frontal control network) responsible for thoughts and actions becomes active. The “What’s this really about?” conversation is integral to thinking about the future, negotiating options, discussing intellectual concepts, determining what we want to discuss, figuring out what everyone wants, and then using either data and reasoning or stories and compassion to achieve consensus.



help? hear? hug?

Emotional conversation

In other words “How do we feel?” conversation is dominated by our emotions, beliefs, and memories. It is about listening for vulnerabilities, hearing what is unsaid—and, just as important, about showing we are listening.” That takes matching people’s mood and energy, asking deep questions, ensuring you’ve understood, and showing vulnerability. Emotional conversations engage neural structures—the nucleus accumbens, the amygdala, and the hippocampus (among others). When a friend complains to us about their boss, and we sense they’re asking for empathy, rather than advice, we also sense they are in emotional conversation, not the practical one.

Social conversation

The “Who are we?” conversation emerges when we discuss our relationships, how we are seen by others and see ourselves, and our social identities. It is about our role in larger groups. To navigate the tricky waters of social identities we must remind everyone they have multiple identities and get people on equal footing. In social conversations we are using our brain’s default mode network, which plays a role in how we think about other people, oneself, and the relation of oneself to other people. This conversation occurs, for instance, when we gossip about office politics, or figure out the people we know in common, or explain our religion or family background—or any other identity.

3 conversations mix

Many conversations go through all 3 of these conversation types. For example, a discussion might begin when a friend asks for help thinking through a work problem (what’s this really about?) and then proceeds to admit they are feeling stressed (how do we feel?) before finally focusing on how other people will react when they learn about this issue (who are we?). Miscommunication occurs when people are having different kinds of conversations. When one person is speaking about their boss who drives them crazy with the intention to vent emotions about this situation (emotional conversation), and their interlocutor starts to give advice (practical conversation)—it’s more likely to create conflict than connection.

So it is important to become fluent in identifying and moving through 3 types of conversations. On a very basic level, if someone seems emotional, allow yourself to become emotional as well. If someone is intent on decision making, match that focus. If they are preoccupied by social implications, reflect their focus back to them.



help? hear? hug?

Tips for connecting conversations:

- **Notice clues**

(in order to recognize the type of conversation your interlocutor want to have):

- Are they emotional?
- Do they seem practical minded?
- Do they keep bringing up other people or social topics?

- **Ask directly**

Ask your interlocutor for what kind of a conversation they are seeking for. You might ask: “Do you want to be helped, hugged, or heard?” Different needs require different types of communication, and those different kinds of interaction—helping, hugging, hearing—each correspond to a different kind of conversation.

- **Prepare yourself**

“*What’s This Really About?*” conversation often occurs at the start of a discussion, so you can prepare yourself before the dialogue starts. Researchers found that simply preparing a list made conversations go better. There were fewer awkward pauses, less anxiety, and, afterward, people said they felt more engaged. So, before a conversation starts, ask yourself:

- What are two topics you might discuss?
(like: last night’s game and TV shows you like)
- What is one thing you hope to say?
- What is one question you will ask?

And even if you never talk about these topics, you’ll have them as a plan B and you will be likely to feel more confident.

When this preparation becomes a routine, you can upgrade your preparation to:

- What are two topics you most want to discuss?
- What is one thing you hope to say that shows what you want to talk about?
- What is one question you will ask that reveals what others want?

- **Ask about feelings and share your own**

There is a cycle: Asking deep questions about feelings, values, beliefs, and experiences creates vulnerability. That vulnerability opens emotions. And that, in turn, helps us connect.



help? hear? hug?

aim of use:

The matching principle can serve as a beginning of a discussion on what it means to be a supercommunicator, how to use communication to connect with others, and how to recognize and synchronize various types of conversations.

educational method:

• Step 1: Conversation lines

Start with introducing the aim of the activity. Divide participants in 3 groups. Make sure that in each group participants form 2 lines facing each other and that everyone has an interlocutor to talk to. Tell the participants that in each group people work in pairs and that one line of people will be storytellers and the other line will hear the story and react (define which line is doing what). Storytellers would be invited to tell a brief story of a social behaviour that annoys them in everyday life (on a level of 1-2 on the scale of 10, with the aim to learn and not to solve the challenge). You can give examples, such as people not respecting the queue, neighbours throwing trash around, passengers speaking loudly on the phone. All the storytellers have the same instructions, but each of the 3 groups of listeners has a different task (write down the task on a piece of paper and show it separately to each listeners group making sure the storytellers do not see the instruction):

○ instruction for listeners in group 1:

Be practical! Figure out what to do with this situation:

- * Propose solutions
- * Lead to make decisions

○ instruction for listeners in group 2:

Ask for emotions!

- * How do you feel?
- * Do you need acknowledgment for fear/ frustration /anger?

○ instruction for listeners in group 3:

Ask for social matters!

- * How will other people react if they know about your frustration?
- * What does this situation tell about our society?

Allocate around 3-4 minutes for storytelling and responses. Ask storytellers to be brief with their stories and invite them to answer the questions their listeners may ask.

help? hear? hug?

- **Step 2: Check on the lines**

After sharing the stories, ask each of the storytellers groups to guess what was the type of conversation in which their listeners were (what kind of questions they were asking). Open a quick discussion on how both the storytellers and listeners feel and how this process was for them. Reveal the texts of each group's instructions and present to learners 3 types of conversations (practical, emotional and social). Explain the matching principle and invite participants to one more round of storytelling and listening.

- **Step 3: Choose your type of conversation**

This time, invite participants to reflect on which type of a conversation (practical, emotional, social) they would like to be in, when sharing a brief story of a social behaviour that annoys them in everyday life. Ask participants to group themselves in 3 groups (practical, emotional, social) according to their preferred type of conversation. Ask participants to form pairs and define who is a storyteller and who is a listener. Invite storytellers to share their stories and listeners to react to the stories based on the preferred type of a conversation.

- **Step 4: Debriefing**

Invite participants to group reflection over their experience by asking:

- How do you feel?
- What was the difference in the process of the first and second round of sharing?
- What did you learn about yourself in this activity?
- Have you ever experienced the lack of synchronisation in conversation types?
- Can matching principle improve everyday conversations? How?
- How would you like to implement your learning in everyday life?

- **Step 5: Tips sharing**

Consider sharing with learners the tips described in the description of the approach.

read more:

- **Book:** Charles Duhigg, Supercommunicators: How to Unlock the Secret Language of Connection (2024)
- **Article:** Interview with Ch. Duhigg by D. Robson, Supercommunication: The secret to better conversations
- **Website:** official website of Charles Duhigg





help? hear? hug?

co·wonders



Cofinanciado por
la Unión Europea