

A COMMUNICATION PROBLEM – TO TRY TO SOLVE IT

Elmar Hergenröder¹, Juraj Vaculík²

Anotace: Príspevok sa zaoberá riešením problémov, ktoré vznikajú alebo môžu vznikáť pri komunikácii medzi jednotlivými pracoviskami s hlavným zameraním na oblasť spracovania zvuku.

Klíčová slova: sound design, komunikačný problém, komunikačné techniky

Summary: Contribution is aim to solve a communication problems, which may occurs in real life between cooperate workplace or person with basic target to area of sound design in television production.

Key words: sound design, communication problem, communication technique

1. WHAT KIND OF PROBLEM OCCURRED?

The following problem occurred at a TV station under public law in the area of television production. One of the main faculties within a telecast is the audio part. The responsible person for the entire sound characteristics at the scene is the audio engineer. It is a standard communication procedure that the appropriate producer asks the personnel allocation who of the eighteen available audio engineers will make the production. The colleague in the personnel allocation checks his schedule because there are much more telecasts at the same time and tells the name of the chosen audio engineer to the producer. If the said person is alright for the producer the process is completed. But if not, the communication problem begins precisely at that point.

The German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno said that a real communication will begin first of all with a disturbance. I could imagine this proposition is generally right; however in this case it is absolutely right.

In a very short form the problem is that the people who want to get some thing -here the producer and editors want to have a certain audio engineer for their production- do not talk directly to the actual responsible persons. They want to bypass them in order to enforce their personal wish by talking to a colleague in the personnel allocation who is a few hierarchy levels under the responsible.

2. HOW THE PROBLEM HAPPENED

As head of audio production I am responsible for the audio engineers and audio technicians. The colleague in the personnel allocation called me by phone and told me about a producer who wanted to get a certain audio engineer for his next

¹ Ing. Elmar Hergenroder, University of Zilina, elmar.hergenroeder@brnet.de,

² Doc. Ing. Juraj Vaculík, PhD., University of Zilina, department FPEDaS juvac@fpedas.uniza.sk

telecast. Exactly this audio engineer was planned for a different telecast at the same time. The producer wanted strictly to get this engineer and argued this engineer would be the very best one and no other could do this task as well as he will do. So the personnel planner did not know what to do and asked me for help in this situation.

It was just a short telephone call, but the afterwards way of solution and the solution itself has always trans-sectoral and internal political consequences.

3. THE PEOPLE WHO WERE INVOLVED

At the first contact and at the beginning of a problem the circle of the concerned people is small and manageable.

First step of involved people:

- Producer
- Personnel planner
- Head of audio production

The second and the third steps are growing more and more complex and sophisticated. Significant is the ramped up attendance of managers in higher level of hierarchy. They are more or less direct or indirect concerned with the basics of the problem.

Second step of involved people:

- Producer
- Personnel planner
- Head of audio production
- Editor
- Telecast director
- Head of personnel allocation

Third step of involved people:

- Head of audio production
- Editor
- Telecast director
- Head of personnel allocation
- Head of economic department
- Head of studio production

4. WHEN WAS THE PROBLEM WORSE, WHEN WAS IT BETTER?

At this point I must say I am not allowed to let a problem become worse because of the internal political consequences I mentioned above. However, the worst case could be that the executive television director could say to me: “You

have to dispose this certain audio engineer the producer and editor want to get for their telecast.” Then I only can say to myself, it is not the best decision, but I have to accept it. This is one drawback of the management top-down mode. With this kind of fixed hierarchy the communication flow is fixed too.

If the problem may grow so far, I did a very bad job and I did a lot of mistakes in negotiations with the involved people. Therefore I could say my communication technique was actually not successful.

In principle we can say this problem becomes worse in the second and third step of involved people, because of the complexity and time intensity. The better chance to solve it, in order to save time and get successful, is found in the first step of involved people (if it is possible!).

5. SOLVING THE PROBLEM

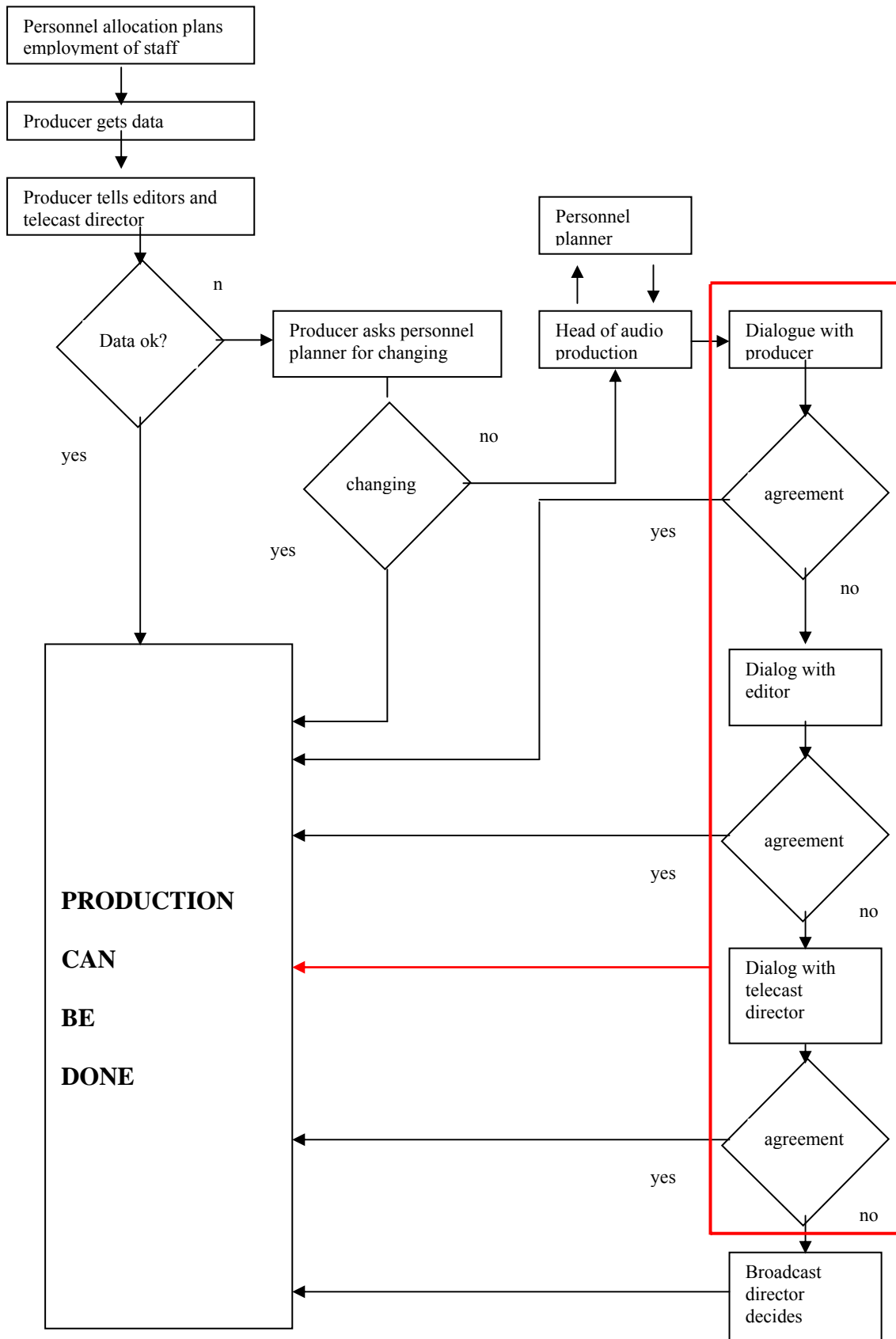
First of all I tried to clear up the situation with personnel allocation. Were there other possibilities? Are we able to correspond to the wish of the producer? Why is this certain audio engineer planned for a different telecast?

Several arguments were checked with the background that we (the personnel planner and me) had to be absolutely sure that there is no other possibility. After we had checked all arguments exhaustively we came to the conclusion that the audio engineer was not available for the producers telecast. To check all possible combinations is an essential activity to be firm for the following negotiations with the concerned people.

In my opinion and in this special case the most successful way is to go directly to the producer, editor and telecast director for face-to-face negotiation to get a clear resolution. It is not possible to get an agree to disagree.

The problem was solved in the discussion at the same time with the producer, the editor and the telecast director in a face-to-face negotiation. I could declare the necessity that this certain audio engineer had to take the different production because of career and disposition facts. After one hour the result was that the audio engineer took the different production. All discussion partners leaved the meeting with a good feeling. For the future I will do it in the same way and discuss it with all partners together at the same time.

In the following is shown the graphic communication structure in order to get an impression of the workflow and the communication interfaces. The third step as you see in point 3. is not mentioned in the graphic below because it leads not to new cognitions. The lines in red symbolise the new communication structure which will save much time and conflict potential.



6. COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

To negotiate is always a communication activity. The participant parties should try to get the best common solution; however they have different needs and points of view. For real negotiations it is necessary to have basically volition or at least readiness to a common solution. This should be the guideline. In our case we cannot assume that the producer, the telecast director and the editor come to the meeting in order to make an agreement. They want to assert their manning with a certain audio engineer.

So I had to prepare some dialogue techniques in order to communicate with my negotiation partners in a goal oriented way and to get an agreement which is for all participant parties maintainable.

For preparation I had to clear my arguments and give my own thinking a straight line. The same procedure as for presentations was here important too: kiss (keep it short and simple). Don't loose the line; don't be diverted during the dialogue. Some more aspects I prepared for the dialogue and thought about them:

- **How does we say it** - through vocal and/or linguistic deficiencies my dialogue partner could not understand what I want to say or he understands it in a wrong way. The body language or non verbal communication (facial expression, gesture, looks, tangencies, room distance, talking breaks, accent, talking speed, etc.) is an important communication parameter.
- **What we mean** - objective intention presented clear and articulately in factual manner.
- **What the others hear** - opinions of the other dialogue partner, acoustical and miscellaneous ascendancies make the others to hear not exactly the argument I tell them.
- **What the others mean that we want to say** - all negotiation partners are prejudiced. My dialogue partner hears what I say to him and interprets his own opinion into my words.
- **The language we talk** - use the words your negotiation partner knows and uses too. For example: If you want to sell a vacuum cleaner to a housewife (or houseman) use her (his) house-language. In communication engineering we would talk about the same frequency in transmitting information signals.
- **Mirroring** - show your partner that you understand what he says through repeating the main facts of his sentences.
- **Logic arguments** - create logical chain of arguments and results. If you don't overburden you listeners they could not resist you arguments. An argument has two blocks: point of view and rationale.
- **Hierarchy of arguments:**
 - [1.]begin with a strong argument (you spark interest in your words)
 - [2.]in the middle of negotiations bring your weaker arguments (less is more)
 - [3.]at the end of negotiations decide for your best argument (waverer will decide for you)

In several courses and workshops we learned theoretically some communication techniques. Of course at a workshop you can get some exercises with the other participants. But the real world is something different. Anyhow the knowledge is stored and what we especially learned at this communication example is the good feeling to be able to apply the stored knowledge at the present moment it is needed. With every negotiation we learn more and more for future dialogues.

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Reviewer: prof. ing. Tatiana Čorejová, PhD.
University of Žilina, Faculty of Operation and Economics of Transport and Communications